The Skullgirls Encore Loops

By: RPMasterweaver

This world's got enough troubles without time going wonky. Unfortunately, time going wonky seems to be spreadin' through the multiverse. Now a crazy band of maniacs and sociopaths have to deal with their lives scratchin' like a record... Part of the Infinite Loops project

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The Skullgirls Encore Loops

Introduction
It's Showtime!
Everybody, Mind Your Marks
You Could Use A Break
Everybody Warmed Up?
Nobody Blink
Don't That Just Beat All?
You're In Over Your Head
Let's Meet Someone New!

It's Showtime!

Around 2014, XeroM52 wrote a number of snips for the overarching Infinite Loops project, specifically relating to the world of the Skullgirls. While his works were entertaining, he could not quite keep up with the quality or speed of the project at the whole and, a year later, vanished entirely. The following is the start of a revamp project-taken what he wrote, cleaning it up, and inserting new snips to cover plot points that were glossed over by the original work. It is the hope of the compiler that this will shore up any inconsistencies and lack of structure in the original compilation. Without further ado: The Skullgirls Encore Loops.

1.1 Masterweaver

[Skullgirls/Neon Genesis Evangelion]

Annie's life had been complicated enough before time started hiccuping. An immortal child, a warrior against the very threat her mother had become, an unseen advisor to rulers and agencies across the world... it didn't help that almost everyone she met assumed she was an actress, or a fan, that the show she had made with the intent of educating the world was regarded as fiction. And then at around the time the most recent Skullgirl had come to light... time seemed to stop, sputtering like a gunked up car engine. She'd assumed, at first, that it was due to the wish the Skullgirl had made. She'd even gone in and demanded to know how the girl had done it, but...

...well, the little girl had seemed utterly nonplussed. Not only that she was real, but at the concept of time repeating itself. Her wish had been vengeance on the local mafia, nothing more. That she was still

sane enough to let Annie go afterwards spoke volumes of her willpower.

The immortal child warrior had decided to back off then. She kept an eye on the Skullgirl, of course, and the various people who went after her and the skull heart, and... it varied. It varied wildly. There had been a lot of fights-pointless, countless fights, some ending with death and others with the loser walking away. There had been unusual heroes and unexpected villains, and mostly just greedy fools desperate to regain some sort of control over their life. She'd only intervened once, when the wrestling idiot got himself caught up in a big mess-she told herself it was because he was a man, couldn't become a skullgirl, didn't deserve that fate. But for the most part...

...it was all so pointless. Some of the wishes... most of the wishes were actually genuine. Some of the people destroyed the skull heart. For a year, peace-and then time hiccuped, and back to the beginning, the game playing out again, the pawns not seeing their fate. It didn't matter what their goals were, it didn't matter how good or evil they were, or even if they succeeded. No reward, or punishment, ever lasted. If Annie had been wired to grow, she might have felt it stagnating... but she'd been stuck in her own mentality for so long that her primary response was simply weariness.

Finally, one repeat, she had enough. She approached the church where the Skullgirl resided, dealt with the eldritch nun-a decent fight, one of the few challenges she had had in long years-and walked down to the catacombs. The white-haired Skullgirl tried to speak with her, but she performed her chosen task efficiently. And once the girl had been dealt with, once the Skull Heart was in her grasp, she steeled herself to make her first-and last-ever wish.

"Skull Heart... I want to know why time is repeating. I want to know what has happened. Grant me this, and bestow upon me your curse."

The Skull Heart was silent, for a moment or two.

"...Interesting," it finally replied. "Interesting indeed... a wish that can only be granted by your demise. I know not how I know this, or why it is. But this wish is..."

It trailed off.

"...to grant you this wish is to kill you. To kill you is to stop the next skullgirl before she even rises. And yet this wish is impure..."

"There will be others," Annie pointed out. "Others willing to accept your curse for their own reasons."

"You would know. Very well." The Skull Heart began to glow. "Accept your death, girl of the stars, and accept your answer!"

The light grew blinding, painfully searing through her flesh, her bone, her remaining eye-

-and then suddenly she found herself in an abandoned city, watching a single boy through a window as some great monster launched an attack.

"...what?"

The next few days had been... interesting, to say the least. The pattern was vaguely recognizable-a secret government task force mandated to defend the world against horrifically powerful monsters, using children and experimental weapons to do so-but it was so overblown, so much faster then back in New Meridian, and the culture alone seemed highly different.

And she had both her eyes. Granted, they were red, but...

She wasn't sure if she wanted to follow the commands of the higher-ups, who appeared to have some mysterious plan, but she wasn't sure she could defy them-none of her long-term resources existed

here. She was a child at their mercy, and after seeing how they treated the boy she doubted they had any mercy at all.

She considered just walking out into one of the "angel" attacks, but the Skull Heart had said she would find answers here, so she endured.

And then one day, a penguin waddled into her apartment.

A penguin. An actual penguin.

Annie looked at it for a long while.

"...Yeah, I've learned that cute things are rarely anywhere near as harmless as they seem," she finally said. "So, what, do you have the ability to freeze me to death or something?"

"Or something," the penguin agreed.

"Huh." Annie nodded, sitting down on a chair. "I was only half expecting you to talk."

"Yes, well. Don't go spreading it around. I try to keep on a low radar around nonloopers."

"Nonloopers."

"People who aren't looping." The penguin cocked its head. "You are looping, right?"

Annie narrowed her eyes. "...Maybe. What does looping mean?"

"Repeating through time, and occasionally being shunted to other universes."

"Yeah, that... about sums it up."

The penguin cocked its head the other way. "...This is your first fused loop? Your first loop outside your home world?"

"I'm guessing you've never heard of the Skull Heart, so yeah."

"Hmm. I'm going to have to explain everything." The penguin turned around and shut the door. "Fair warning, you and I are the only loopers Awake at the moment... so far as I can tell, so talking to anyone about this will not be having pretty results."

The penguin's explanation was basic, but thorough. A great supercomputer tree known as Yggdrasil, underlying the multiverse, had suffered near cataclysmic damage. The gods who were working on repairing it-and wasn't that an interesting concept, gods that actually cared about the world she lived in-had set up each universe to run through time loops in order to maintain their stability. And in each universe, one lucky soul was selected to be the Anchor-the hard point around which each iteration would revolve, whose mental stability would hold the world together.

Annie had run down the list of other 'stable' people she'd noticed and concluded her own selection was less 'best of the best' and more 'only possible choice.' Which, unfortunately, led to the issue of other loopers from her home...

"Hold on. You're saying that other people are going to join me in this."

"It really is inevitable," the penguin replied. "It's a very rare soul that can survive an infinite repetition alone, and-"

"Well, I guess I'm a rare soul, then."

The penguin looked at her askance.

"I'm an immortal child in my baseline," Annie pointed out, "and almost all the other people that are consistent in my loop are consistently... disturbed. I don't want any of them as my friend-not one."

"...You might not have a choice," the penguin pointed out. "It doesn't matter how crazy they are, if they're emotionally close to you-"

"Then I'll be distant." Annie nodded. "I won't tell them about the loops. I won't intervene. It's a wreck anyway, but at the very least, staying away will keep the mess from getting worse."

"You do realize you might be... sacrificing any control you have over the situation. That some of them could be activated without your input."

Annie frowned. "I'll deal with that as it comes. After all, I fight generations of Skullgirls and can't even spit out a single curseword. I don't see how bad this could possibly get."

1.2 XeroM52

Patricia Watson, also known as the Anti-Skullgirl super weapon Peacock, defeated the Skullgirl once again.

"Show's over… Marie…" she said, almost too sadly for it to be a quip. No matter how many times it happened, Peacock could never change the outcome of this fight. At least her dear friend Marie, was in a better place, away from the pain of been a Skullgirl.

Then, as the script dictated, the Skull Heart appeared in front of her.

Every seven years, it granted a wish to a woman. The wish could be of any magnitude, but it came at a price; if the woman's heart was impure, the wish would be twisted and she would become a Skullgirl.

And as the anti-Skullgirl weapon, it was Peacock's duty to destroy the Skull Heart, again, and again. She remembered the first time she did so; the Heart mocked her telling her that it wasn't over yet and that it would return and yadda, yadda, yadda. Peacock couldn't help

but wonder if the whole time loop she was trapped in was caused by the accursed Heart.

Peacock took the Skull Heart in her hands and wondered. Should she make a wish? Maybe that way the loops would end.

"Skull Heart! I'm ready to make a wish!"

"Whatever wish you want I will grant!" the Heart answered, waiting to create another Skullgirl.

"I wish…I wish….I wish for you to turn the world's oxygen into chocolate!" Peacock announced.

"…"

"Hey! What's wrong? Grant my wish now! Chop-chop!" she ordered.

"I…I cannot grant you that wish!" the Skull Heart informed. "Please make another wish."

"Then I wish the moon to be made out of actual cheese!" she decided. "Of every kind that exists and doesn't exist yet!"

"…Can't do that either…" the heart said, getting annoyed.

"Huh? I thought you were supposed to be this artifact with godlike powers that could grant ANY wish! I told you my wish so DO it NOW!" Peacock demanded, rattling the heart as if it was a broken machine.

"I cannot grant those wishes! Please wish for something else!"

"Ok, how about…"

One hour and 45 rejected wishes later, Patricia gave up. "You know, you aren't all that useful, or as powerful as people made you out to be!" How difficult was it to create a blue phone booth that was bigger

on the inside than the outside? Or create a peanut bag with no bottom?

"In my thousands of years doing my work, you are the worst wisher I have met, by far," the Skull Heart lamented.

"Oh yeah? Well screw you too!" Peacock launched the heart into the air and blasted it off with her eye lasers from her arms. "That'll teach ya!" She walked away with the intent of painting the streets red with the blood of the members of the Medici Mafia, just for funsies... and to honor the last wish of her best friend Marie.

1.3 Masterweaver

In some ways, it was a release.

Not a welcome one, exactly. Anticipated. Expected. The rage that flowed through her, from the moment she had touched the Skull Heart, finally burned out. In her last moments, she turned to the one that had defeated her, tried to explain, warn her of the rage within...

And then biology caught up with her, ribs exposed to the air, head and arms and legs scattering to physics, it was so much like falling asleep.

Including the part where she woke up.

As if from a dream.

Marie Kobel blinked, staring at her pale hands, looking around the crypt she stood in. She patted herself down-yes, yes there were her ribs, still open to the air, like she recalled. Perhaps this was the afterlife, and she simply had to accept her new form as-

WHAT IS THIS?!

-she nearly stumbled as a blast of unadulterated anger came, not from herself, but from the darkened orb beating within her chest.

What are these memories? Where are they from?!

"I don't know," she mumbled. "But-"

You are too weak to be a skullgirl. You have already been defeated, not by an army but by one fool. I will end this!

The black orb burst out of her chest, wisps of dark smoke dragged from her eyes and mouth and weaving around it, into the glowing eyes as she fell, once more taken by darkness-

Marie Kobel blinked, staring at her pale hands, looking around the crypt she stood in. She took a steadying breath, useless as it was without lungs. "Well, that was... odd."

WHAT IS THIS?!

She flinched, glaring at her chest. "I don't know, but you escaping clearly isn't happening! So don't try it!"

For a moment, there was silence.

Perhaps this is the end. Yes, that would make sense...

Marie barely had time to respond before rage, even more potent then any she had felt, poured through her. A scream tore from her throat as bones rattled, gathering around her body in ever increasing density-she was barely cognizant of the blue veins extending outward, stretching her form even as the roof above her burst, and her thoughts were drowned out by the fires of anger and hatred as her great form swung through the rotten city, crushing heroes with skyscrapers and blood splattering everywhere as she stomped through the realm of mortals, mind darkened by an ancient presence bringing one last apocalypse to a world that should long have died...

Marie Kobel blinked, staring at her pale hands, looking around the crypt she stood in. She took a steadying breath, useless as it was without lungs.

WHAT IS-?!

Then she clamped down on the mind of the skull heart. "No. We've tried your way twice over. You can look through my memories and see it. This time, we're trying my way, and you are not going to defy me."

For a moment, there was silence.

I am a god, you know.

"And I am your prison. Now we're both going to have to deal with it."

After a moment, there came a resigned, resentful grumble. *We ask Double about this first. Maybe she knows something.*

1.4 XeroM52

Now that Peacock thought about it, this whole thing with the time loops opened up a world of unimaginable possibilities to do stuff she initially never thought of doing. 'Initially' because if she had thought about before this whole shebang started, she would've done it anyways. There was nobody that could stop her then, there was nobody that could stop her now.

She made a cartoonish big evil smile as she approached her first victim.

Peacock neared Fillia, a amnesiac girl with a parasite instead of hair, and pulled downed the girl's skirt.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?!" screamed a red faced Filia.

"I just wanted to know if the carpet matched the drapes!" was Peacock's response.

Peacock jumped to the back of her next victim.

"Patricia?! What are you doing?!" Big Band asked in surprise.

Peacock didn't say anything as she put her mouth on the sax mouthpiece that was on his back, and blew. Sound came out from somewhere of Big Band's body-to be expected, since he was mostly instruments by now.

"Well, well, well, what do you know?" she laughed as she jumped out of his back. "I CAN play you like a saxophone!"

"Never do that again, you hear?!" Big Band shouted in anger and embarrassment.

Parasoul, the crown princess of the Canopy Kingdom and leader of the Black Egrets, was minding her own business when suddenly she felt a pair of hands grabbing and squeezing her chest.

"Darn it! Just 34DD? Not as big as the Nurse's 36E!"

"Unhand me you perv!" Princess Parasoul screamed as she swatted away the offending hands. "I'll have you imprisoned for life!"

"Well, ExcuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuUuUuUuUuUuUuUuUuUUUUUuuuuuuUUUUUUsme, Princess!" Peacock quipped as she ran away.

"Patricia, have you come to put a stop to me?" the skullgirl Marie asked the one who had once been her best friend on the whole world.

"Nope! Sorry! Close but no cigar!" Peacock said. "You aren't yourself when you're hungry, so I came here to give ya some sugah, toots!"

"What are you…?" But before Marie could even finish, Peacock planted a big wet kiss on her lips.

"So, how do you like that?" Peacock smiled, expecting some sort of funny reaction from Marie.

Instead she got something else.

"Patricia…" Marie whispered before enveloping her arms around her dearest friend began kissing her back.

"Wait! Stop! This isn't what I was expecting!" Peacock tried to free herself from the crushing hug that Marie was giving her.

In the end Peacock got her just desserts and then some.

1.5 Masterweaver

WHAT-?!

Marie pushed down on the now-familiar source of her rage, locking it back into place. "I've lived through a good two dozen repeats, no attempt of yours has let an escape, so..."

She paused, ignoring the mental grumbling.

"...actually, I have a question for you, Skullheart."

I have already granted you the power to fulfill your wish, the Skullheart pointed out. *I am under no obligation to help you further.*

"No, but you're stuck with me anyway. And..." Marie twiddled with her white hair nervously. "Well. I'm... sort of considering, maybe..."

There was a pause.

You are not serious.

"I mean if I'm stuck in this repeat of time, I should... try new things, you know?" Marie glanced down at herself. "And I'm not really dressed to head out."

This idea of yours is ridiculous.

"You're stuck with me, though. So whatever else, I figured you'd at least want to advise me a bit. Even if it's just to sabotage me for your own amusement."

What makes you think I have any advice for this sort of thing?

"How many skullgirls have there been before me?" Marie asked rhetorically. "Even if you have no direct experience, you have to have some sort of echoes, a vague opinion."

For a moment, there was silence.

Then, an aggravated sigh. *This is what I've been reduced to. Giving dating tips to a prepubescent girl. Will you at least slaughter somebody on the way?*

"Hmm. I'm fairly sure that Patricia would love to join me in ripping the Medici apart."

I suppose that is so. In your case, then, the obvious issue is covering up your ribs. As for the shade of your dress, white hair is best with monochrome clothes, though the exact color of monochrome should be determined by what message you which to convey...

She'd settled, eventually, on a light lavender outfit-there was certainly enough fabric from her mafia-based summons to craft one, though she kept the white lace of her normal clothes out of habit. Her stride out of the church was encouraged by Double and watched carefully by Valentine, though both had interesting reactions when she did not immediately summon the dead to her service and, instead, went about as though it were a perfectly normal day. Perhaps she earned a few looks from passersby-certainly her sunglasses marked her as strange, even without her pale skin and hair. Yet nobody would attack an innocent little girl in broad daylight...

Well.

Nobody *alone* would attack an innocent little girl in broad daylight.

She paused, tapping her hands together. "Now... how would I find Patricia...?

She's an anti-skullgirl weapon. You could do something that skullgirls usually do.

"No, that would attract attention. Perhaps... I think she likes cartoons."

Obviously.

"So I need to find a theatre that is showing cartoons... and possibly action films." Marie nodded to herself. "I think I know where a movie theatre is, actually. I suppose I'll wait around in there."

The Skullheart grumbled as she continued down the street, eventually coming to her destination and entering. She stood in the lobby, examining the posters curiously.

Something patted at her arm.

"Himm?" Marie turned, finding what seemed for all the world to be a walking plush rabbit. "Oh, hello there. I'm sorry, I'm just... waiting for

a friend."

The rabbit flicked an ear curiously.

"I don't think you'd know her. Patricia, she... well." Marie sighed. "Well, if you did know her, you know she's been through a lot. And I'm... I guess... I've been through a lot too. Maybe this was stupid."

It certainly was.

"I just thought I'd run into her here."

The rabbit stared at her for an uncomfortable moment.

"...I'm sorry, I'm being rude. My name is Marie." She held out a hand. "What's yours?"

The rabbit took the hand and shook, holding out a small card.

"Carl?" Marie read out loud. "That's a nice name."

The rabbit nodded, pointing at a nearby poster.

"What? Oh. A new action film showing in a couple hours." She looked over the reviews. "Patricia likes this sort of thing... At least, I think so... it's been so long."

Carl patted her arm reassuringly.

"...You're right, I guess. Maybe I shouldn't give up hope just yet." Marie smiled as he waddled off. "It was nice meeting you, Carl!"

Annie couldn't curse-the limits of the magic that made her immortal forced her tongue to be child-safe-but as Sagan returned she felt that urge rising. "Trinity fudge this whole darn situation. The skullgirl, the SKULLGIRL, is looping. What the hay, Yggdrasil, I thought you were supposed to be against reality falling apart!"

Her plush rabbit familiar shrugged.

"Yeah, yeah, I know, I know." Annie sighed. "And she's got the most 'emotional connections,' she's the darn skullgirl. Of course she would activate."

What to do, what to do... she didn't know how to reverse a looper's activation, if it was even possible. Technically, she should just avoid the girl as much as possible-an Anchor's death meant a loop crash, which meant more trouble in the long run. At the same time, though, the girl could-and frequently DID-destroy the entire city of New Meridian, and that was just baseline. Give her access to the multiverse...

Annie shivered.

"I can't stop her," she mumbled. "I can't contain her. But... maybe I can redirect her."

This skullgirl, at least, was more restrained than the many that had come before her. That was one small, lucky break-that the Skullgirl who did end up looping wasn't one of her depraved predecessors, but an abused little girl with a good and strong heart. She might even still be a person-scratch that, to loop you had to have a soul, so yeah, she was definitely still a person. Although, being in such close and constant contact to the skullheart...

She would need something to counter that. Something she could care about consistently. Another looper.

And, while Annie didn't like the girl, she'd picked up on Peacock looping-she might have been crazy, but her 'experiments' had gotten wild enough to track, and the fact she never repeated them rational enough to record.

"So I guess you're going to get what you want, skullgirl." Annie shook her head. "Maybe you'll be able to keep her in line, anyway."

Patricia Watson-Peacock to her friends-was not exactly stupid. Impulsive, insane, deranged, discombobulated, yeah. But stupid? No siree bob!

She'd heard somebody talking some incredible reviews on that new action flick-it had caught her attention because the speaker *sounded* like the heroine of her favorite show, but everyone knew Annie was just fiction and besides, the little girl had sunglasses and blue hair-Annie had an eyepatch and green hair. Also she had no sword. So obviously, not Annie of the Stars-even in disguise, Annie would never abandon that sword.

Unless you were reading really, REALLY bad fanfiction.

The point was, the girl went on about this movie, and Peacock had said to herself 'yeah that sounds like a fun time' and wandered to the local theater to buy a ticket. That had been the plan, anyway; go in, get ticket, watch movie, get out.

A plan that was utterly dashed when she saw who was standing in the theater lobby.

Yeah, her dress was a different color than the usual black. And, okay sure, plenty of people had white hair. It was the sunglasses that really gave her away, though. That and the red eyes.

The red, skull-printed eyes.

It didn't take a genius to figure out the girl was waiting for her-the moment those skull printed eyes fell on her, they widened, and the girl stood straighter. Peacock, of course, couldn't exactly meet them; her eyes were gone and she saw through the petal-like extensions on her arms, these days. But she turned her face toward her friend's... former friend?... as she sauntered over. There didn't seem to be any bracing for battle... which was odd, given what they were.

A skullgirl and a skullgirl killer.

She paused, smirking her beartrap smirk, and whipped out a cigar. "So, toots. What's happening with you?"

The other girl frowned, taking the cigar from her hand. "That's not healthy for you, you know."

"Hey look girlie, I don't know if you realize it but I've pretty much run my course on healthy living."

"I..." A sigh. "I know. Look... Patricia... can we talk? I mean, I know you're probably suspicious of me, what with me being..."

She lowered her sunglasses briefly.

"Yeah, maybe a little." Peacock took the cigar back. "Fair warning: you break out bones, I'll break *your* bones. Nothing personal, just my job."

"No, I understand... more than you know, maybe." She paused. "Patricia... I think something's wrong with the world."

"Plenty of things," Peacock took a snuff of her cigar. "Watcha mean specifics, toots?"

"You see, I've... this is going to sound crazy, but... I've been living the same year over and over."

Peacock choked on smoke.

A cursed lich child and a mutilated little girl sat openly in the park, with nobody taking notice. If that wasn't a sign of New Meridian's staple callousness, Peacock didn't know what was.

"...So, uh. You're the one with the ancient magical artifact." She rubbed the back of her head. "You got any idea why this is happening?"

"No. If it had just been me, maybe-or if it had been me and everyone I fight, I could... sort of get it." Marie shook her head. "But... I don't know what's going on."

"Yeah. This is all weird." Peacock chuckled. "And that's coming from *me* ."

"Patricia-"

"Don't sugarcoat it, toots. I got eyes on my arms and none in my skull, and that's just the obvious." She leaned back into the bench. "You ever wonder what it's like to have a normal life?"

Marie nodded. "All the time," she said, her voice almost a whisper.

They watched the clouds pass.

"...Patricia," Marie said hesitantly. "I... um. In my last repeat-"

"Time loop. Repeat sounds boring, time loop sounds sciency."

"Alright. In my last loop, I, um... I don't know if you remember this, but... well, you came down to the crypt-"

"Yeah, skullgirl hunter, remember?"

"-and, um, we... kissed."

Peacock didn't need to blink, but long disused facial muscles activated out of shock.

"Kissed."

"Well. We... did a lot more then kiss, actually-"

"You, uh. You remember that, huh?"

Marie nodded.

"...kay, so... first of all, that was fifteen loops ago for me."

"Oh."

"Secondly," Peacock let out a slow sigh, "and I ain't saying this is right, but... I thought I was the only one looping, okay?"

"Right."

"And when you go through loops often enough, when you see people just... doing the same damn thing over and over and over again, you start to stop... seeing them. As people."

Marie sagged. "...oh."

"...of course, uh." Peacock rubbed the back of her head. "Thing is. All the stuff I got up to, I got up to it cause... cause there was nothing else to do, you know? It was... desperation, trying to find some reason to live. Any reason. Cause, you know... what I'm saying is, I don't think of you as just not people."

Marie was silent.

"I mean, look, even before all this started, yeah you were the skullgirl, but you were also my friend. And... even after I had to put you down, I decided I'd make sure your final wishes were followed. Kill off the Medici, you know? What I'm saying is, maybe... maybe the kissing stuff didn't mean nothing. Or, I mean, it meant nothing at the time, but that wasn't because of you, that was because I was-I mean, it could mean something. If you, you know, want."

"...I... well." Marie rubbed the back of her head. "I mean... it's... we're both children, Patricia."

The park was silent for a moment or two.

"...were we ever, really?" Peacock murmured.

"...I guess not, no." Marie sighed. "What with me being the skullgirl, and you being..."

"A walking corpse?"

"You're not dead. Trust me, I would know."

"Yeah, you would, wouldn't you?"

"Still." Marie held out her hands. "This. Us. I don't think either of us has any idea how this should go, am I right?"

"Nah. Then again, I have no idea how anything should go." Peacock gave another wry laugh. "Which, given that I'm apparently time travelin', is a real hoot."

"Well, we're in the same boat there." Marie paused. "Even if we're not always on the boat at the same time."

"Yeah, we should come up with a signal for that."

"Yes."

"...So." Peacock let out a breath. "If this is going to be a thing-if it's us, going to be a thing. Is it just, like, cause we're childhood friends, or cause we're both the only ones in this loop, or... is it going to be, you know, real?"

"...The skullheart is an angry thing. But it's also a thing that has lived through multiple skullgirls, most of whom had lives before becoming skullgirls." Marie turned to look at her. "I think, if we want it to be real... we have to understand each other. Trust each other. And then decide that it's real."

"Sounds pretty cliche."

"Well, I am getting advice from an ages old artifact that wants me to tear apart everything, so..."

"Yeah, fair enough." Peacock turned to face her. "So... just figure it out as we go along?"

"I think that's the usual standard."

"Sounds like... well, not a plan, but something I can agree with."

The two of them looked at each other for a bit.

"Hey, so about that 'tearing apart everything' jazz. If we're doing this, we should have some shared hobbies, right?"

"Yes...?"

Peacock smirked, showing off her bear-trap teeth. "Want to go slaughter the Medici clan?"

Marie's smirk wasn't metal, but it was twice as dangerous. "I thought you'd never ask."

1.6 XeroM52

Peacock had eventually realized that these time loops did not necessarily have to be accurate to what she remembered. Sometimes, fights would be won by different people, or some just plain didn't exist.

But this loop was the most different she had ever encountered. The Skull Heart existed, obviously, it never didn't exist; but instead of everyone fighting for the Skull Heart, they were racing for it. Wacky Races Style!

And Peacock loved every single minute of it.

The whole gang of not so imaginary friends were riding alongside her. Andy Anvil would usually be the driver while she relaxed on the back, but this time she wanted to have all the fun. Currently Peacock

was on second place, only a few yards behind Marie; her friend was racing on a dragon skull car, in order to defend the Heart and her title as the Skullgirl.

"Darn it! We need to go faster!" Peacock said in frustration. A lightbulb popped out of the top of her hat, and she bared her metal teeth. "We're too heavy! We need to lighten our weight!"

The rest of the gang shut up for just a second... before each tried to convince Peacock to throw out anyone besides them.

"You weigh a lot more than me, Tom!" Andy Anvil pointed out to Tommy Ten-Tons.

"Hey that's just my name! I do not weight ten tons!" Tommy countered. "Besides, Lenny is way bigger than me!" He pointed at the gigantically obese bomb sitting on the back.

"Hey! Lay off poor Lonesome Lenny!" Avery defended. "Don't you see he's depressed lately, especially after the last time loop?"

"Yeah, you're right!" Peacock conceded. "I guess this means poor George will be the one to go!" She picked up a much smaller version of Lenny that could fit in her palm. "Sorry to do this to you George, but we have to win!"

The poor little bomb tried to plead, but he was unable to say anything, because he didn't have a mouth to speak with.

"Goodbye George! We will always remember you!"

Peacock threw George off her car and into Squigly's, which was a coffin of course. The poor bomb couldn't do anything else but explode. "Aaahhh!" Squigly lost control of her vehicle and ended up crashing on the side of the road.

"Alright! We lost enough weight! Let's go!" Peacock said. The car started to accelerate and she cackled maniacally.

High speed racing, explosions, and some vehicular manslaughter; what else could a girl ask for?

1.7 Masterweaver

Marie Korbel was...

...well, she was still Marie Korbel.

It was a shock, really, staring into the mirror at the brown-haired, blue-eyed girl. The girl she had been, before the skullheart. Her hand trailed down her cheek-her still living cheek, blood flowing within and warm in her grasp. The eternal rage of her power and price was... gone. She...

...she was an ordinary girl.

Well, ordinary orphan girl. The war had just ended a few weeks ago-she was seven years younger... Patricia. Patricia!

"Patricia!"

"Huh?" Another girl looked up. "What is it Marie? Is something wrong?"

"I-"

Marie stopped.

Looked into her eyes.

Her... brown, uncomprehending eyes.

"I... just..."

This Patricia was only six years old. Only six, and... she didn't even remember, did she?

"It was... sorry. I just... needed to see you."

"Ooooooookaaaaaaaay." Patricia leaned back. "You're kinda weirding me out here, Marie."

"I'm kind of weirding myself out too." Marie admitted. She paused, wringing her hands. "Can... May I give you a hug?"

"Uh... sure."

Marie wrapped her arms tightly around the other girl, trying, and failing, to hold back tears.

"...Hey." Patricia, hesitantly, returned the hug. "We'll always be together, okay? Promise."

"Yeah." Marie sniffed, a small smile on her face. "Pr...promise."

In a little bit, she'd clear her eyes, go to the closet, and pick up a canister vacuum. For the next week she would spend time swinging it around, mentally preparing herself. And when they came-

Oh, when THEY came. There would be blood, and bones, and vengeance.

And Patricia would be safe.

They would both be safe.

But for now, Marie allowed herself to be just one little girl, hugging another.

1.8 XeroM52

Peacock loved warped time loops because she wanted to know who crazy her world could get, even more so than in whatever qualified

as the original reality. And this time it was no different, because this time they were all 'fighting' each other …by playing ball.

"Batter up!"

It had been a difficult season for their team, the ASG Labs, because this season their opposing teams had been exceptionally difficult. The Fish Bones had Ms. Fortune, who could hit any pitch no matter if they were meant to be balls. Not to mention her and the rest of the team ability to steal bases was incredible. The Theons had the combined efforts of Fillia, Squigly and Eliza of all people; with the help of their parasites, they were a well-balanced team. The Des Cartes were difficult to beat thanks to their heavy hitters Cerebella and Hubrecht who could homerun like nobody's business.

But the ASG Labs had beat them all thanks to their varied team of misfits brought together by Dr. Avian, an old coach that retired because he grew tired of what the sport had become. Now he was back one last time, and he would show the world how real baseball was played.

Now the team was against the Black Egrets, and if they wanted to have a chance to ever play against the Skull Hearts to win the cup and the prize money for poor lab 8 children who needed their operations, they had to win this game.

"Heh! Those Black Egrets are a bunch of chumps! There is no way they can beat us!" Peacock said. She took a poof of her light cigar as she swung her bat in preparation with the other hand.

Then the Black Egret's pitcher entered the field.

"Holy shit!" She dropped her cigar in shock. The guy was 10 feet tall and had a TANK attached to his arm.

"GO PANZERFAUST! Strike her out!" shouted one of the Black Egrets. "FOR THE PRINCESS!"

The shout prompted the rest of the Egrets to join in, chanting "FOR THE PRINCESS!" over and over. Peacock looked at the behemoth that was going to threw baseballs at her for a whole minute.

"...Finally! A real challenge!" She said, smirking enthusiastically. "Come on big boy, show me what you got!"

And with that the game was on!

1.9 Masterweaver

Marie Korbel had, in most of her lives, hunted down an ancient and terrible magical artifact, knowing full well it was cursed, knowing that its usage had led to the destruction of her home and the murder of her parents, specifically to destroy the Medici clan in revenge for what they had done to her and all the other orphans-Patricia especially.

So discovering herself in a life where she not only served them willingly, and faithfully, but also was apparently madly in love with one of their top members...

Marie took a breath and, very slowly, let it out. She recognized the life she'd been put in, of course-the one girl she could remember from her many fights pure enough to use the skullheart and *not* become a skullgirl. Not that she had used its power. No, she was too focused on the mission from her... *beloved* .

A brief look over this life's memories made Marie shudder. The man was old enough to be her grandfather and had practically raised her! How could he treat her that way... and if this was exactly like that girl's life, how could she not have noticed? She must have been completely naive!

"No," Marie said firmly, "I don't think this is something I'm going to let happen."

She picked up the living weapon on the edge of her vanity. For a moment, she contemplated the... uncomfortably exposing dress her reflection was wearing.

"Change of clothes, then break the mafia," she decided firmly.

A thought fluttered across her mind as she went to her dresser. If she was here... who had the skullheart?

"Wow, Marie sure wasn't kiddn' about the rage thing," Peacock quipped.

Your broken mind cannot hold me forever, girl! I will break free, and then-STOP PECKING ME, YOU MANGY PIGEON!

"Oy!" Avery cried. "I'm clearly a bluejay!"

Peacock shrugged, leaning back on her bonethrone. "Eh, I ain't got nowhere to go. Might as well just relax this loop."

1.10 XeroM52

Canopy had always been a kingdom alongside the other countries that conformed the continent, Peacock had known that for all of her existence. So it was really weird for her to hear that there was an election going on to decide the ruler of the Canopy country.

"If you re-elect me as your president, I promise to keep doing the same excellent job my family had been doing for generations in protecting the country and keeping the economy afloat," the 'Princess' of Canopy, Parasoul Renoir, declared on National Television to millions of people watching the Presidential Debate.

"Thank you Miss Renoir," the mediator for the debate said. He turned his attention to the other candidate. "Now we'll hear the statement of

presidential candidate, Republican Double."

On the other side of the stage, there was a nun standing on a podium readying her statement.

"Miss Republican Double, your turn."

"I'll only say this. Vote for me! Republican Double, because unlike my opponent I am made of 50% bubblegum and 50% Religion."

After a few seconds of silence, the mediator cleared his throat. "Miss Republican Double, you have 30 more seconds."

"Oh, yeah! I also promise to cut 10% on all taxes and put money on what Canopy really needs….tentacle porn, starring mostly me." Then she look to the side. "And possibly, my Vice-President, Valentine." She pointed out at the nurse whose uniform left almost nothing to the imagination.

This statement caused an uproar from the audience and before anything could be done or say by anyone else, Republican Double took the mike once more. "Now if you excuse me, I'll have to go, there is a party I must attend... A Republican Party. " And with that she made her exit. "Riding on my REPUBLICAN CAR!"

Parasoul looked dumbfounded at the now empty podium. After a moment, she shook her head and declared, "I think we all know who is going to win." After that scene, there was no way people were going to vote for Republican Double.

The day after the election, all over Canopy, people were celebrating the election of their new president: Republican Double.

"I can't believe people actually voted for her," Big Band exclaimed as he read the first page of the newspaper.

"What can I say?" Peocock said to the one man band. "People really dig the whole Nurse/Tentacles Fetish." The ASG weapon lit up a cigar. "A damn shame my candidate didn't win."

"You rooted for Parasoul?" Big Band asked, surprised by the girl's interest in politics.

"Ptff…hell no!" she snorted. "Me, rooting for the stuck-up princess? Nah, I voted for the third party, Beowulf!"

"Beowulf?!" Big Band asked in confusion. "Was he even competing? I never heard anything promoting that wrestler as a presidential candidate."

"That's because all of his promotionals were during his wrestling matches." Peacock explained. "Here, take a look at this one I have on video." She used a remote control to turn on the TV.

"Ask not *Am I a Bad enough Dude to save the president?* " Beowulf said directly to the camera while he was on the middle of a ring stepping over a defeated opponent. "Ask instead *Is the President a Bad enough Dude to SAVE ME!"* Then a stinger appeared on screen, with Annie from Annie of The Stars saying 'VOTE BEOWULF'.

"So…beautiful…" Peacock said, a small tear rolling down her cheek.

1.11 Masterweaver

The doors to the crypt slammed off their ancient hinges, sliding across the floor as they kicked up the pews and smashing the statue of Queen Lamia into so much rubble.

The smiling nun standing behind the podium nodded politely. "Lady Marie."

"Double." The skullgirl crossed her arms. "Or should I call you Lamia?"

The nun stepped out from behind the podium. "I'm surprised. The Skullheart wouldn't let that information out easily... but no. I am a cast off form of our goddess... an echo. A double, as it were." Her eyes opened, the habit she wore twisting slightly. "And I suppose you won't simply submit, will you?"

"I've found reason to live," Marie replied, blue veins of power rippling out of her dress. "And I've tamed the skullheart." Skeletal soldiers marched from the crypt. "Why should I follow the will of a dead god?"

"It is through that very will that you have your power." Double's form warped, clothing and flesh merging and ripping as she rose. "You may wish to deny it, but in the end without it you are nothing. You will join its cause, or you shall perish. That is your destiny."

"I was once destined to be nothing more than a slave to monsters. I sought out the power to change it. And now, I have it." Marie rose into the air as well. "You are a pale reflection of your creator, and no destiny will shackle me. You will stand aside."

"All timelines converge!" Double cried, bone and entrails forming a spiked whip. "You cannot escape their grasp!"

"Maybe not," Marie shouted back as she brought forth her vacuum. "But I can bend them to my will and break FREE!"

Two parts of a long-deceased deity charged at each other, the great potency and adaptability of the body facing the gathered power and animosity of the heart. There was little quarter given as bone and flesh battled, shattered skeletons and gouged guts littering the once pristine floor of the church. Double's face, inhuman though it was, grew increasingly and clearly furious; Marie's own expression hardened, bent into cold, unforgiving rage. Neither held back any of their power-neither cared to acknowledge the shattering walls, the

terrified screams of the populace, as lich and monstrosity fought and tore for dominance.

The various weapons meant to contain her were brought around Marie-the servants of the laboratories, the black Egrets, the princess of Canopy herself. Even the Medici and other, less evil criminals put aside their grievances, surrounding the battle in hopes of containing it. And for once, Marie ignored them-focused on the ever twisting, ever growing form of Double, she who had promised her power and hidden her purpose. Even as the supposed guardians of the world attacked her, she did nothing to stop them-nothing save force her true foe into their sights.

At last, with the rising of the sun, she smote her foe upon the ground. Her power retreated, and she strode over to the smoking crater; her vacuum swung to face Double's twisted face even as it struggled out of the rubble.

"...No... no skullgirl, has ever, been able to defy me." Double pushed itself up, glaring at her. "You cannot... defy the goddess. The trinity... will have their revenge. This world will break!"

"It's already broken." Marie let out a breath. "Doesn't mean that it's dying, though."

The black egrets rushed into the ruined church, their weapons all leveled on Marie. The princess of Canopy opened her mouth, but was cut off by a roar from the mass of flesh Marie faced.

"You cannot-the Skullheart cannot be tamed! There's no... I am the double! The reflection of Lamia! I will not see her will be subsumed!"

Marie quirked a brow as the modified children of the labratories swung over the rubble. "You are the corpse of a goddess. And I have become the goddess of corpses. You will submit."

"You... are impossible! You cannot do this! You know the darkness of this world-it must end!"

"Yes." Marie looked up, to where the criminal family she hated had just entered the final ruins of the church. "I know the darkness."

She let her gaze fall on Patricia. "But I have also seen the light."

Her eyes focused on her foe. "The fractured timelines are my home, and I will make them livable. The cycle of the skullgirls and trinity's revenge is over. One last time, Double: Submit to me, or die."

"...I follow always... the last command... of the goddess!"

Double lunged at her, claws sharp and jaw unhinged.

Marie simply turned her vacuum on and sucked her from the world.

And... for a moment... there was silence.

"...I apologize for the damages, princess." Marie turned to the still shocked woman leading the army of Canopy. "I assure you this will not happen again. In fact, I believe I shall return to No Man's Land, and stay out of your hair." She gestured toward the Medici clan. "That said... given that it was this group enslaving me and mutilating my friend that led me to pursue this power in the first place, you may wish to look into your affairs more carefully."

The princess stared at the smoking crater. "...Was that really Queen Lamia?"

"...what remained of her, yes." Marie sighed. "Don't let the gods determine your fate, Princess. Make your fate the best it can be."

She looked back at the crater. "Maybe then, this world will heal."

MECHANICS OF THE LOOPS:

One person in a Loop, often the main character, is an Anchor. They are the person who first starts time looping.

There is always at least one Anchor present in a given Time Loop snippet, though it may not be the local one.

The standard pattern for a loop is that the Anchor (and whoever else is Looping there) come to awareness in a loop at a particular point in the story. From there, events will play out as influenced by the Loopers present, acting with the benefit of their foreknowledge, until either a predetermined end point is reached or the anchor dies.

To be Awake is to be aware of the time loops (that is, to have gone back in time this time.)

The Anchor is the only character guaranteed to be Awake. Even after others have started looping, it is mostly random as to whether they will be Awake this particular loop.

Crossovers, fusions, and alternate pasts can also take place. It is perfectly possible, for example, to have the characters Awaken into a loop which conforms to a fanfic universe rather than reality.

Loops do not have to be in chronological order, but it is strongly preferred that they not require a mutually contradictory order (where A must be before B and B must be before A.)

Just about every Looper is very, very stir crazy.

Compiler's Commentary:

1.1: When your only choice of friends is a bunch of crazies, you might well choose to have no friends.

1.2: Peacock, ladies and gents! She's too insane for even the gods.

1.3: Marie has always had a strong will. The loops just give her a chance to refine it.

1.4: Boredom and loneliness can be just as maddening as torture.

1.5: Proof that something can be creepy, and heartwarming all the same.

1.6: Not everything will always be the same for loopers.

1.7: They'll get some unexpected second chances...

1.8: ...they'll get to play some crazy fun games...

1.9: ...they'll get a new perspective on their lives...

1.10: ...they'll occasionally get just plain weird stuff...

1.11: ...and in the end, they're going to get to choose their own path.

And of course, fair reader, should you wish to contribute your own snip, you are welcome to join us on the Indie Games Infinite Loops thread over on Spacebattles.

Everybody, Mind Your Marks

Sometimes the loops can be silly, and sometimes they can be serious. Today, there's a lot of the latter, and not so much of the former. But don't worry, we're just setting the stage for the next parts of the Skullgirls Encore Loops!

2.1 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Marvel]

"Well, it seems we aren't in New Meridian anymore!" Peacock commented out loud as she stood on top of a very tall building and observed the city around her. It wasn't like she was really that impressed by it, what caused her slight whiplash was the lack of familiar architectural design.

"Apparently we are in a place called New York City in a country named The United States of America!" Avery, the small bird-like parasite that resided in Peacock's hat, informed her.

"New York? What a goofy name…" Peacock said, wondering what the hell was up with this Loop. She had never heard of New York City or this U.S of A. country. And by the lack of ferals on the streets down below, she concluded that she might not even be on her own world.

"What should we do now?" Avery asked. Since this place was another world that meant there was no Lab 8, or a place they could call home. No, Dr. Avian, no Big Band, no Leduc, no Hive, no Stanley, not anyone they knew.

"I guess first he have to find a place to crash around here!" Peacock suggested, before her stomach made a rumbling sound. "But first we

found something to eat!"

"But we have no money!" Avian reminded her. "And I'm not sure they accept our currency here!"

"Don't worry your tiny little head; I know how we can get some money!"

2.2 XeroM52

"Marie! Marie!" Peacock called out to the current Skullgirl as she made her way down the catacombs beneath the Grand Cathedral of the Trinity.

"Patricia? What are you doing here?" Marie asked, confused. It was too early for anyone to know she was underneath the Cathedral and before she even started her killing spree of the Medici Family.

"Marie! Forget whatever plans we had for this loop! I discovered something incredible!" the human weapon said excitedly.

"What?"

"This Loop, Halloween exists in our world!" Peacock announced cheerfully. "Think about it! A day filled with costumes, candy, and screaming children!"

"I don't know…" Marie said, not entirely convinced about the holiday.

"And to top it all out, we can pull the biggest prank by, maybe…" Peacock finished her sentence by whispering into Marie's ear with a smirk that would've sent shivers to any normal person. Luckily Marie wasn't a normal person.

"That sounds delightful," She answered with a sweet smile. "You really know how to plan a date, Patricia."

2.3 XeroM52

' *This is certainly strange…* ' Marie thought as the small pink haired girl hugged her with all of her might. If memory served her right, the child hugging her was Parasoul's younger sister Umbrella.

"Mama…I love you Mama," Umbrella kept on saying, over and over again.

It was quite heartwarming, and Marie didn't have it in her to correct the child and tell her she wasn't her mother. Children usually recognized their mothers by their faces, but for Umbrella something more was what she used to identify her mother. *'It must be the emanating power of the SkullHeart from her real mother.'* Umbrella was very young when Nancy Renoir went through her Skullgirlfication. It was probable that the child bonded with the power of the Heart through the time she spent with her mother. ' *And because she associates the Heart for her Mother, she is completely blind to the fact I look nothing like Nancy.* '

"Mama, please stay with me…"

Marie would be lying if she said that she didn't feel some sort of affection for the girl on her arms. Either because it reminded her of the children back from the orphanage or because of some residual love from Nancy still on the SkullHeart, Marie would look out for the child and see that nothing bad would befall her.

"Of course my child… I'll stay with you."

That was a white lie and Marie knew it. Any minute now an unawake Parasoul will come down running to the catacombs and fight to recover her little sister. And for both sisters' sake she would have to throw the match.

Well, that was the plan if not for the inconvenient fact that Peacock had to arrive first and screw things over.

"Marie?! Is it true? Are you the Mother of this child?" Peacock asked, way too overdramatically to it to be taken seriously. "Woe is you! A mere child yourself tasked with taking care of a child on your own!"

"Patricia, what are you doing?" Marie deadpanned, not finding any humor on her friend's attempt at a dramatic scene. "Cut this out."

"Well I shall not stand for it; I'll take responsibility for the excuse of a man who abandoned you and your child!" Peacock continued, ignoring Marie's interruption.

"What?" Marie asked again. "Umbrella is far too old for me to…"

"I shall help you raise your child as if it were my own!" Peacock declared in a grandiose manner.

"What?" Marie repeated her question, completely baffled by Patricia's words.

"Mama! Is this person my new Daddy?" Umbrella asked innocently enough, not really seeing the absurdity of it all.

"I…" Marie was about to refute and put an end to this ridiculous scene, but Umbrella's big pleading eyes were enough to made her reconsider. "You see…"

"Yes, I am your new daddy!" Peacock said before Marie could say anything. "In fact why don't we all go for Ice Cream to celebrate!"

"Yay! I want strawberry!" Umbrella cheered happily as she went over and gave a big hug to her new father.

"And after that we can go to the amusement park! That is if your Mommy wants too," Peacock added, making the pink haired girl to jump up and down excitedly.

"Can we go to the Amusement park, Mama?" Umbrella pleaded once more. "Please! Mama, I really want to go!"

Marie was between a rock and a hard place. If she refused she would disappoint Umbrella and have her cry, but if she agreed she would have to put up with Patricia and her 'joke'. Either way it was bad for her. But, finally, she gave into the lesser of the two evils.

"Very well, we'll go to the amusement park."

"Yay! You are the best Mama!" Umbrella celebrated by giving a big kiss to her 'mom' on the cheek, making Marie blush a little. "Come on Mama! Let's go." And with that she began dragging the maid away excited for ice cream and the amusement park.

"Yes. Let's go!" Peacock said with a big cheeky grin plastered on her face.

2.4 XeroM52

"Marie! Marie!" Peacock called out for her friend as she came down running down the stairs to the catacombs beneath the Grand Cathedral.

"Patricia? Why so early?" Whenever the two would awake together in the same Loop, they would meet at night so that they didn't have to deal with Double. For Patricia to come so early and go through the trouble of defeating the eldritch abomination meant that there was something really important.

"Marie! You have to come quick! Hurry!" Peacock insisted as she dragged the maid away. "We must go!"

"What's the hurry?" the skullgirl asked worriedly. Was there some sort of troubling variation going on up in the surface?"

"Just mask your appearance and come along! It is the best thing to ever occur!" the living weapon said excitedly. "Hurry or we gonna miss it!"

"What is it?" Marie asked once again as she turned her appearance from a Skullgirl to her regular form.

"You'll see…"

In Canopolis, the capital of the Great Canopy Kingdom, lay a building where people gather to watch the most awe-inspiring spectacle. It was a place where legends were born and would die in an explosion of light and glamour. And the exploits witnessed within would forever pass down from generation to generation.

And tonight the greatest of heroes was fighting against his most fearsome rival yet.

Beowulf vs Scythana!

Tonight Only.

At

THE SKULLDOME!

"Wrestling? Really?" Marie asked to her friend, who had an enormous grin on her face.

"Not any wrestling! The best kind of wrestling!" Peacock said enthusiastically.

"Isn't Scythana supposed to be a jailed terrorist?" Marie, of course was referring to the incident when the Half-Gigan attacked the Renoir Grand War Memorial. Although she never understood why she attacked the place to begin with. ' *Maybe I should dedicate a Loop to find out that answer.* '

"Nah," her friend denied. "In this Loop Scythana went into wrestling instead of having a criminal career. Now the world is better for it."

"Of course it is." If one ignored the existence of the Skullheart, the skullgirls, eldritch abominations, organized crime, slave trading, the raging racism against ferals, discrimination against women (because of the Skullgirls), illegal human experimentation, crazy parasite hosts, Eliza, cloning, soul fusion, robots, cyborgs, the undead, cursed artifacts, illegal use of magic, and the underlying tension between the 3 nations that could spring into war anytime soon.

' *But as long as we all had Wrestling, everything is fine with the world,'* Marie thought sarcastically.

"Shh! It's starting!" Peacock said without taking her 'eyes' away from the ring.

Marie couldn't maintain a sour mood after seeing such child-like emotion from her dearest friend. It was just so damn cute and charming. Still, it didn't mean she was 'down' for a night or wrestling, so she took out some liquor from her pocket. She might have been technically just 13 years old, but she was an undead abomination that was this world's equivalent of a walking nuke, and she had a severe case of sadism against Mafia goons, so underage drinking or developing an alcohol addiction wasn't on her 'Things to worry about' list.

After the names announcements at the grandiose entrance that both fighters had, Marie had expected them to started fighting right away. But instead they delved in the ancient practice of 'Trash Talking' something that had been going on for already 20 minutes. And to tell the truth, it was really engaging.

"Admit it Beowulf! Your time of glory is over," the half gigan, who was literally two times as tall as Beowulf by standing around 12' 3" (3.74 m), said into a gigantic microphone designed just for her. "Since you defeated Grendel all those years ago, you haven't had a decent fight

in years," the blond pointed out. "All because Canopy is filled with weaklings and it will always be!"

This of course got the audience to Boo at her, Patricia being one of the most vocal ones. "Shut that tramp's mouth shut, Wulf!"

"Hey, wait a second there!" Beowulf pointed over dramatically. "You can't just come here to Canopy and insult the whole kingdom!"

"And what do you care about your pitiful Kingdom?" the half gigan shot back.

"I served my country!" Beowulf declared proudly. "I fought against not One but Two Skullgirls!" This statement made the whole crowd go wild. There was no greatest service to one's country but to fight against the Skullgirl. And Beowulf had fought two!

"You may be hailed as a hero in Canopy, Beowulf!" Scythana admitted as the crowds cheered slowly died down enough for them to hear what was going to be said. "But tonight, there is someone here that regards you as a monster."

"What do you mean?!"

"You expected me to come alone to this Smackdown?" she said with a smirk. "I brought someone that has a bigger beef with you than me!" Then from where Scythana entered the ring, another gigantic creature appeared.

"Remember me?" The gigan said making Beowulf flinch in fear.

"It can't be! GRENDEL?!" This made the stadium explode in shouts of disbelief. "I thought you were DEAD!"

"Yes! And I came from the depths of Hell to have my revenge against you Beowulf!" Grendel growled. "Not because of what you did to me!" He pointed out to his new metallic arm. "But for what you did to my MOTHER!"

"Patricia! What happened between them?" Marie asked completely invested on the narrative of the fight.

"Grendel was the previous Champion and everyone thought he was invincible, that is until Beowulf came along and stole the title from him alongside Grendel's arm," Patricia explained the deep lore behind this new epic fight.

"But what about Grendel's mother?" Marie asked again and her answered was question right on the ring.

"I had to put a stop to your mother, Grendel!" Beowulf said apologetically."She was about to eat all those innocent spectators when you were declared dead on the ring!" That day was a dark day for the newly crowned champ, and left a bad taste on his mouth. And a great mark on the history books of Wrestling.

"I don't care! You took my mother's life and my title! And tonight I shall take both your life and my tile back!"

"I defeated you before, I can defeat you again!" Beowulf said without fear.

"Yes, but this time I had Scythana as my partner!" Grendel pointed at the blond half gigan. "With our might combined, you are nothing but a bug, Beowulf!"

"I think not Grendel!" Beowulf stood his ground valiantly. "You may think I'm alone against you two. But what don't know is that you walked into the Wolf's Den and the public tonight are my Pack!" he said as he put on his wolf skin.

"For the strength of the pack is the wulf, and the strength of the wulf is the pack." This made the entire crowd go crazy and started chanting his name over and over again.

"BEOWULF! BEOWULF! BEOWULF! BEOWULF! BEOWULF! BEOWULF! BEOWULF! BEOWULF! BEOWULF!"

And in one of the seats, a certain skullgirl was watching the whole spectacle with new eyes.

"Patricia…"

"Yes, Marie?"

"I love Wrestling!"

"I knew you would!"

2.1 (con't) XeroM52

BOOM!

The bank doors exploded as Peacock made her escape in the 'Bandwagon'.

"Boss! Are you sure this was a good idea?" Avery asked from inside Peacock's hat.

"It's fine! It's fine! I left an I.O.U back at the bank!" Peacock said, driving on the sidewalk since New York's traffic was a nightmare.

"I really don't think they're gonna accept that," Avery pointed out.

"What can I say? We needed money. And you know what they say: Gotta get the cash gotta get the dough!"

"People don't really say that, though."

"Well, it's not like-"

But before Peacock could make another clever observation to set up a good joke, a body fell from the sky and landed on the trunk of the Bandwagon.

"Stop right there!" ordered what looked like a female squirrel feral.

"Ok!" Peacock stepped over-comically on the brake, making the car to come to a complete stop in disregard of the laws of motion and sending this squirrel person flying away towards the asphalt.

Luckily for the feral, she had the natural-born abilities and agilities of a squirrel, so she landed gracefully and without injury. "Hey! Watch it!" Still, that didn't mean she wasn't angry about it.

"Sorry, no need to go 'nuts' about it," Peacock said with a cheeky smile.

"Did you just…?!" the squirrel person asked back, insulted.

"That was nuttin'! I got plenty more that will 'crack' you up!" Peacock dropped all pretenses and started to laugh.

"I was just going to stop you and return what you stole from the bank, but now… it is personal." The infuriated squirrel cracked her knuckles.

"Oh yeah. Bring it on sister!"

A few minutes later…

"Impossibru! I cannot be beaten!" Peacock said in disbelief.

"That'll teach you!"

"Gah! That's not fair! Attacking off screen is prohibited, you furball!" Peacock ranted as she struggled to get out of the ropes she was currently tied with.

"Not, when I'm around! And the name's Squirrel Girl!"

"You…you truly are The Slayer of All That Breathes!" Peacock admitted as she was carried by what clearly was the most powerful

being in this strange new world.

2.2 (con't) XeroM52

[October 31st , Canopy Kingdom]

All over the Kingdom, people were preparing to celebrate the spookiest of holidays. But none were as excited as the occupants of Lab 8... well except for one.

"I can't believe you aren't letting me go to that sexy-costume party!" Hive, one of Lab 8 experiments created to combat the Skullgirl, said angrily. "I'm already old enough!" she complained to the caretaker, Ileum, whom all referred as EliMom, since everyone thought of her as their mother.

"If you have to say that, then you clearly aren't old enough!" Ileum countered back.

"The worst thing that has ever happened in one of those parties was when a sexy nurse got in fight with a sexy schoolgirl and a sexy catgirl!" Hive tried to argue back with no results.

"I failed to see the point you are trying to make, Hive," Ileum deadpanned. "Not to mention, that scene you just described sounds like something we see a lot around here."

"Why do I have to go Trick-or-Treating with you and the rest of the lab kids?" Hive complained once more. She wanted to spent the night having fun, not spent it with little kids.

"Because, the rest want you to come along, it wouldn't be the same without you," Ileum explained. "And you wouldn't want to sour their night, do you? On one of the few days they are allow to leave the lab?" the caretaker nurse said, expertly guilt-tripping the rowdy teen.

"O..Okay! I'll go." Really, the nurse did know how to put people on the spot. "But I'll keep my sexy devil costume, I you can't say anything about it!" Hive said referring to the skimpy red dress she was wearing.

"As long as you don't expose yourself to the kids, I don't particularly care," Ileum deadpanned again. "Now of you excuse me I have to help the others get into their costumes!" And with that she left the surly teenager alone.

"Gah! Why do I have to go! Every one of my age will be going to parties and having fun! Really, the only ones who enjoy Trick-or-Treating are little kids!"

"Hey! Hive!" A voice called out for her. It was another Anti-Skullgirl creation, a blond boy her age named Leduc. "Are you excited for Trick-or-Treating? Because I can't wait!" the blond said excitedly as he showed off his costume. "This year I'm a Vampire! Do you like it?"

Hive just stared at Leduc for a whole ten seconds before face palming. "Leduc, when I thought you couldn't possibly be lamer or nerdy…" she trailed off without finishing her sentence, and walked away from him.

"Was it something I said?" the blond asked, confused, as he scratched the back of his head.

2.3 (con't) XeroM52

For Marie walking down the street to the Ice Cream Parlor and ordering their treats had been easy enough, but having a child cling to her who constantly called her and her best friend Mama and Daddy, prompted a lot of awkward stares from people passing by. Thankfully most people assumed they were just a bunch of kids playing 'Family' or something. It also helped that Peacock had

forgone her usual dress for a nice suit that make her look like a sophisticated young man. Except for one thing…

"Patrici…I mean, Patrick!" Marie corrected herself and used Peacock's male name just to keep up the act. "Is the Pimp cane really necessary?"

"Of course! How else I'm going to get them 'Female dogs' to move out of the way, huh?" S/he said good-humoredly as if s/he was talking about the weather.

' *Well, at least she is watching out for her language.'* Marie gave her that.

"Female dogs? You mean Bitches, daddy?" Umbrella asked innocently, making Peacock laugh out loud. "What about boy dogs?"

"Well for those I have something else, but you'll just have to wait 'till you're older for you to understand!" Peacock replied with a knowing smirk. "But what I basically do is that I-"

But before she could corrupt Umbrella's mind with some 'Rated-M' tale, Marie took her vanilla ice cream cone and shoved it in Peacocks mouth making her choke a bit. "Here, have a taste of my Ice Cream, Dear!" Marie may let Patricia get away with a lot, but robbing Umbrella of her naiveté and innocence was out of the question.

Except this backfired for her when Umbrella, trying to imitate her, shoved her ice cream onto her Mama.

"Mama! Taste my Ice Cream too!" she said as she splattered strawberry Ice Cream on Marie's face.

"Ha ha! Strawberry looks good on you!" After recovering from her choking fit, Peacock laughed at the look on Marie's face. "Hey Umbrella! Want to have a taste of my Ice cream?" she said as she turned to the pink haired child, who nodded in consent. "Here you

go!" she proceeded to smear her chocolate ice cream all over Umbrella's mouth.

"Ha! Ice Cream fight!" Umbrella declared as she took more ice cream and threw it into the air hitting some other costumer.

What followed was too hectic to describe, but it involved, Ferals, Parasites, Living Weapons, Cyborgs, Robots, Magic, Dagonians, lots and lots Ice Cream and one zombie. Needless to say the three of them were banned from entering that particular Ice Cream Parlor ever again.

2.5 XeroM52

After Awakening alone, Peacock decided to go for a 'walk', and by that she meant going around painting the town red with the blood of the Medici. She usually did this when she defeated Marie and destroyed the heart, because she would be damned if she let anyone else but her hurt Marie and use the Heart for some stupid reason. Besides, Peacock always promised the unawake Marie that she would continue to kill the Medici in her name. On the plus side it was lots of fun to kill people as long as they were bad guys.

Peacock was on her rampage through the Medici tower on her way to meet Lorenzo Medici, the head of the Medici Mafia, like she always did, but then she was stopped by the most unexpected of individuals.

"Halt right there you criminal scum!" said a mysterious horned figure.

"It can't be…" One surviving Medici goon, who currently was dying of blood loss, recognized it. "Deep Violet!"

"Deep Violet?" Peacock asked confused. "Who the hell is that?"

"A vigilante that was a pain in the Medici ass for many years…I thought she retired," the goon spewed convenient exposition before she spew blood and finally died.

"That's right, but I have come out of retirement to put a stop to you and your senseless murder!" the purple vigilante declared as she took out her golden serpent whip out. "I know that the Medici are scum and rotten to the core, but murder isn't the answer!" D. Violet was a firm believer of a punishment that fitted the crime.

"Look, don't you come here and claim to have some sort of High Moral Ground over me when you are dressed like that, Grandma!" Peacock pointed at the revealing… um… outfit was such a strong word… let us say it was more of a… thing that covered what needed to be covered. "Look at you, I seen pornos with more decency than you!"

"Well, I'm not ashamed! In fact I think it is empowering," D said loud and proud.

"That's not the point! What are we, the impressionable young girls of the world, think when our feminist idols exposed themselves the way you do? Do you realize the damage this causes? Girls everywhere want to be like you and will grow up with unreachable expectations! Not to mention the fact that they would think that the only way to feel empowered is to dress in skimpy outfits for the benefit of the male audience!" Peacock chastised the older woman. "And don't tell me it is as a distraction, because that excuse doesn't fly with me; you clearly wear that to be seen and lusted after!" It wasn't like Peacock really believed in any of the things she was saying, she just liked to put people on the spot.

"I…I…" D. Violet tried to rebut the girl's accusations but couldn't come up with anything. "It doesn't matter! You are still killing people and I shall put a stop to you and punish you accordingly!" She emphasised this by whipping the floor with her golden whip.

"Well, come and get it, Grandma!" Peacock taunted. "But let me warn you, I'm not alone!" As she said that, her Gang suddenly appeared next to her ready for fisticuff. "Come on guys! Let's beat up this pervy granny!" Then the entire gang rushed towards the vigilante to gang up on her.

"Pazuzu Whip!"

"Goddamn! I didn't expect that." Peacock rubbed her head as she picked herself off the ground and looked around to see where they were. "Where the heck are we?"

"Squack! I think we are in No-Man's Land." Avery informed from atop of Peacock's hat.

"How the hell did we end up here!? We were in the middle of New Meridian!" And now they were in the middle of nowhere several miles away from any Canopy Kingdom or any of the other Nation for that matter.

"It was that D. Violet woman. She sent us blasting off into the distance," Andy the anvil said as he too rubbed his sore extremities. "I can't believe she beat us boss."

"No way, she must have cheated!" Tommy tried to convince himself they didn't really loss and that the boss wasn't defeated. Next to him Lenny nodded in agreement while George waved a magazine around but he was ignored.

"It's the only explanation, I mean, she was nothing at first but suddenly she became like super strong out of the blue!" Peacock tried to come up with some sort of explanation. Did her 'Living Weapon' give her some sort of boost or something?

"Damn, when was the last time we ended up like this…?" she wondered out loud. "Who was the last one who sent us flying of the distance…?" She tried to recall. "It was…it was…"

"The Hulk!" Andy said surprised.

"No! The Hulk couldn't put a finger on me last time we were on the Marvel Loops!" Peacock declared, sounding almost offended.

"No, no, no! I was referring to this comic book!" Andy shoved the magazine that George had been waving before. "Look, here it says that D. Violet grows in strength the 'Hornier' she gets, just like the Hulk gets stronger the angrier he gets."

"What?! Give me that!" Peacock snatched the comic book from the Anvil hands and read it in detail. After a while the girl lowered the magazine and asked in a low voice. "Do you guys know what this means…?"

"That someone among us accidently made D. Violet horny enough for her to send us blasting off, squawk?" Avery offer.

"No! I mean yes, but besides that!" Peacock demeanor then changed into something chipper. "We have to test the limits of her strength! Let's see how horny we can get her and see the results! Heck, we have to pit her against Marie and see what is more powerful! The Skullgirl or the Power of Horniness!"

"YES LET'S DO IT!" Tommy agreed as the faithful yes-man he was. But Andy had some reservations.

"Boss, we better not. Or we will end up in that Eiken place, that everybody keeps talking about," Andy warned his boss.

"Don't you worry Andy, we had done some crazy stuff before and we haven't crash a Loop a single time!" Peacock reassured him and the rest of the gang. "Heck I'm positive this Loop is un-crashable!"

[Two Loops later]

"Uncrashable you say. Never going to Eiken you said," Marie said, completely livid against her friend Patricia.

"How I was supposed to know the Loop was really going to crash?" Peacock tried to defend herself. "Besides it was all on the name of science!"

"Pairing D. Violet, the woman who gets stronger the hornier she gets, with Z*NE, the 'Goddess' of Perversion, is not science! It was doomed to bite us in the ass the moment you suggested it!" Marie with her eyes flashing red. "The Universe collapsed on itself and worse of all I was on the receiving end of their combined attack!"

"Come on Marie, don't be angry!" Peacock said trying to calm her friend down. "Besides, Eiken wasn't so bad. Just boring as all hell," Peacock pointed out.

"That's because we are so screwed in the brain that all the stupidity and perverseness of Eiken neither bother us nor pleases us." So much that the universe had no other choice but to put both of them in detention while the whole thing happened outside their window. "But the principle of the matter still stands! We got punished by your reckless behavior!"

"But I thought you loved my reckless behavior." Peacock said.

"Only when it sends us to Eiken, I don't!" Marie crossed her arms and turned away from her friend.

"Ah come on Marie! Don't be mad!" Peacock pleaded as she tried to embrace her friend from behind. "Let's me make it up to you. Anything you want I'll do. I swear."

"Anything?" Marie turned around with a glint of her eye that could only spell trouble.

"O-Of course…anything." Peacock gulped nervously.

"Well I want you to…"

"Please Marie, I can't go on like this anymore." Peacock pleaded while covered in sweat.

"Not until I'm completely satisfied." Marie answered coldly.

"But we had been doing this for 12 hours already!"

"Well, I want you to go on for another twelve, Patricia!"

"Mou…" Patricia moaned in complaint as she took a pain roller and kept painting the walls of the city.

Painting the town red wasn't as fun when one did it literally.

2.1 (con't) XeroM52

Director Nick Fury walked down a long hallway inside the SHIELD Helicarrier, towards the detention facilities. Apparently, a Looping Squirrel Girl stopped a bank robbery and dropped the crook here with them. Doreen knew SHIELD didn't care for small things like bank robberies, so that meant that the criminal she stopped must be a very big menace or a Looper.

' *Probably both.'*

"Director Fury!" Agent Maria Hill saluted him as standard protocol dictated.

"So, has anyone found anything about this felon, yet?" Nick asked, knowing that there wouldn't be any background intel if it really was a looper.

"None sir!" Maria answered. "We tried to interrogate the prisoner, but there had been some difficulties…" She trailed off, unsure.

"What? Does she refuse to talk?" Knowing how sturdy some loopers were, normal interrogation tactics didn't work on them.

"…No…just the opposite…" Maria answered, troubled. "She hasn't stop talking since she arrived here," she explained. "In fact, we had to change guards three times already, because they can't stand her for long periods of time."

"I see…" Nick said. He was collected on the outside, but on the inside he was cursing. *'Just what I needed, a nutcase Looper.'* And by the sound of it, she was Deadpool level of annoyance. "I shall interrogate the prisoner myself!"

"Of course, Director Fury." Maria nodded before she led him towards the interrogation room.

SHIELD'S interrogation rooms were varied. There was the classic one with the one-way window, but others were very cramped rooms that instigate a sense of claustrophobia. The Prisoner was currently been held in the second kind.

Nick Fury didn't know what to expect to see from their prisoner when he entered alone, but seeing a small child dressed in an old timey outfit with a top hat and gobbling down donuts wasn't exactly it.

"So the big palooka finally shows up!" the child said with a smile that looked too metallic. "You know, by your name alone I thought you will be dark skinned or something. Not that is anything wrong with that. I mean, Nick Fury isn't a name that invokes the image of an old bitter retired beach lifeguard/detective look alike."

Nick stood silent and just stared at the girl, not wanting to show any reaction of annoyance on his face.

"So! You came to interrogate, right? Well… I better start at the beginning, I was born in November 13th, it was a very cold Friday and…"

"Drop the act and just tell me…" Nick slammed his fist on the metal table. "Are you a Looper?" It was way too direct for his liking, but when dealing with nutcases, subtlety was just wasted time and effort.

"Looper?" The girl repeated back. "I may be a dangerous crazy person with propensity to reckless and violent behavior, but there is no need to call me that, old man!"

"I mean that if time keeps resetting and you're living your life over and over again," Nick explained, letting the old man comment slide.

"Ah! So that is what they are called… the more you know!" the increasingly annoying girl said as she put another donut in her mouth. "So, are you one as well? Can you tell me why I am not in the Canopy Kingdom or in New Meridian?"

Nick Fury sighed as he took a seat. Things kept getting 'better' and 'better' for him; not only he had a crazy looper, it was also a fairly new one too.

' *How much I hate being the one to give this talk.'*

2.2 (con't) XeroM52

Little Innsmouth, a small but bustling residential and business district by the coast of New Meridian, was mostly populated by the Dagonian, immigrants from the Dragon Nation; and inside the famous Dak'kull Dubu, a cat-burglar was preparing to head out into the night.

"Come on Minette! If you don't hurry up I'll leave without you!" Nadia Fortune aka Ms. Fortune, zombie cat girl and thief extraordinaire, was waiting inside the closed restaurant for her Dagonian Friend.

"I'm coming!" Minette, one of the many daughters of the River King and waitress for the Dak'kull Dubu restaurant, said as she walked

down from upstairs. "I'm ready to go!" But when she came downstairs, the restaurant was all alone. "Nadia?" she called out for her friend, but received no answer. "Did…Did she really leave without me…?" she wondered sadly before a shadowy figure jumped at her from behind!

"RAAAAAAAWWWWWWWHHHHH!" The dark figure with a pumpkin head growled as it's arm around carrying the bloodied head of her friend.

"KYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHH!" Minette screamed in terror as she felt down to her butt.

"Meow! I really got you good!" The head on the monster's hand said in a joking manner.

"Nadia! Is that you?!" Minette asked still a little shaken by the scream. "You…you meanie!"

"Oh, come on! It's all good fun!" Nadia said as she took the pumpkin head off and put her own right back on her neck. "Besides we are going to pull this prank on other people all over the city!"

"But why me first?" The dagonian waitress asked as she stood up.

"Because I wanted to know if it would actually work!" the cat-girl explained. "You've seen me without my head multiple times! So if it worked on you, it would work on anyone!"

"I still don't like it."

"Come on! Let's not waste more time and head out to scare some people!"

2.3 (con't) XeroM52

After the crazy fight inside the Ice Cream Parlor, which lasted hours, Marie decided not to head to the amusement park, which Umbrella and Peacock didn't mind since they had so much fun in with the Ice Cream fight, and decided to go back 'home'. And by home they meant breaking and entering a fancy house in the suburbs at MapleCrest, whose real owner wouldn't come back since they were 'indisposed' for working with the Medici.

After some dinner, Marie struggled to convince Umbrella to take a bath. Only after promising that they would all go to the amusement park tomorrow did Marie got Umbrella to clean herself up. And with that she sent her off to sleep to the only bed on the house since this was apparently a bachelorette house, with one big bed at the master bedroom. Of course, Marie had to change the covers for some clean ones beforehand.

"I have lots of fun today, Mama," Umbrella said as Marie cover her with the bed sheets. "Do you think maybe that tomorrow, big sis can join us?" she asked hopefully.

"Maybe…" Marie responded, not wanting to disappoint her. "You know how busy she is all the time." With the Egrets and managing the kingdom Parasoul had little time to spent with her little sister besides having her tag along to debriefings and boring meetings; something that Looping Parasoul deeply regretted and constantly tried to make up to her sister. "But I'll make sure to ask if she can join us tomorrow."

"Mmm…I love you, Mama," Umbrella said as she drifted off to the lands of dreams.

"I love you too," Marie said as she bent down and kissed the little sleeping girl on the forehead. It was strange to say those words to someone who she had no direct relation to, but Umbrella opened her heart to her, so it was appropriate for Marie to do so too, even if Umbrella wouldn't remember any of this when the loop ended.

Marie watched Umbrella sleep for a few minutes before leaving the room and walked down the stairs to the first floor and into the living room where she found Peacock out of her suit and in pajamas, fiddling with the remote control.

"So our little bundle of joy is finally asleep, huh?" Peacock said as she turned her gaze away from the TV to look at Marie, who also donned away her maid dress in favor of black pajamas. "That means Mommy and Daddy can have their fun!" she said, wiggling her eyebrows in a knowing manner.

"I'm not in the mood." Any other day Marie would have been intrigued by the proposition but today she was tired, more so mentally than physically, after this long day. "Have fun all by yourself."

"No way! I even made popcorn and put on 'Annie: Girl from the Stars: the motion picture.' On the DVD. Come on, join me! You know you want too." She invited her over to the couch.

"Huh. Fine." Marie gave in, mostly because there were no other places to rest besides the couch where Patricia was seating on. Instead of sitting, Marie laid down on the couch with her head resting onto her friend.

The two of them then watched the movie about Annie, a magical girl that could summon the Power of the Stars, and together with her cute magical white rabbit Sagan, had adventures and try to stop a Skullgirl from destroying the world.

2.6 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Loony Toons]

"Well…this is certainly new…" Peacock couldn't help but say as she looked at herself in a hand mirror. "I am monochrome…" She looked

exactly as if she was a cartoon character of the times of yore. It wouldn't bother her so much if the environment around her wasn't much more colorful than what she was accustomed to.

"Where the heck am I?" Peacock wondered out-loud.

""Eh... What's up, doc?" asked a voice from behind her. She turned around only to find a very tall rabbit munching on a carrot.

"All of my life savings!" Peacock answered. A big safe came from up above and crashed on top of the rabbit, before spilling out coin bags with a dollar signs on them.

"That was pretty good." The rabbit commented as he came out of a rabbit hole on the floor. "You must have some experience as a toon!" he said, experience since he didn't recognized the monochrome girl from any cartoon he had seen.

"What can I say? I love cartoons; especially the slapstick!" Peacock smiled showing her sharp metallic smile.

"Well, you'll find plenty of slapstick in Toon World," the Rabbit informed her as he munched on another carrot. "The name's Bugs Bunny, by the way," he introduced himself, which was a rarity since almost every looper that visited knew who he was or at least heard of him.

"T…Toon World…?" Peacock face distorted and the black dots for eyes she had became gigantic and showed sparkles in them. "I think I found Heaven…"

' *Hm…she got facial expressions down to a T,'* Bugs thought. *'She is definitely going to fit in.'*

"Come on Wiley! Step on the gas!" Peacock demanded as both her and a coyote were driving a heavily modified Bandwagon, now with a giant rocket engine, chasing after a speedy roadrunner.

"Drive me closer, I want to hit it with my chainsaw!" Once they were near the birdie, Peacock took off her hat from where Avery came out with a chainsaw on its hands. Avery swung the chainsaw several times but the roadrunner would move its neck out of the way every time.

"You infernal bird! I'll have you as lunch!" Peacock shouted. Unfortunately for them, they were nearing a steep curve, which they wouldn't make with the speed at which they were going.

'Oh no!' Wile E. expressed both their sentiment with a white sign.

"You said it, man. You said it," Peacock said, before they flew of the road and into a very long fall to the ground.

2.1 (con't) XeroM52

"Wow, that is quite heavy, man!" the girl said.

"Indeed," Nick agreed, despite the lingo. "Now, I think it is only fair that you tell me who you are, and where you come from."

"Of course! Everyone should have the honor of knowing who I am!" she said with a smile before looking at him questioningly. "Mind if a smoke?" she asked as she pulled an already lighted cigar from what Nick assumed was her subspace pocket.

The director of SHIELD would've objected a minor from smoking a big fat cigar like the one she was holding. "Only if you give me one of those." But he also needed a smoke for what could be a long talk.

"Yeah, man! The best of what Meridian City has to offer!" The girl pulled out another cigar and give it to Nick. "Want me to light it for you?"

"No," Nick answered as he pulled a match and light it himself. "So, tell me…"

"The name's Patricia. Patricia Watson. But I only let few people call me that, and you aren't one of them!" Patricia said. "You may call me Peacock!"

Nick remained quiet, but he was wondering where the heck that alias came from.

"As for where I come from…" Peacock trailed off as she took a puff of her cigar. "That is quite the tale…" Then she blew the smoke out, not from her mouth or nostrils, but from her eye… no, eye socket. Now that Nick paid enough attention, he realized that the girl in front of him didn't have eyes, just empty eye sockets.

"In my world, there is this artifact called the Skull Heart, an ancient relic that can grant any wish to any woman that possesses it. But there is a catch: if the woman's heart is impure, the wish will be twisted and she will become a Skullgirl."

"Skullgirl…?" Nick repeated. This Skull Heart thing reminded him of another wish granting monstrosity by the name of Kyubey. "Does it work exclusively with women, or you mean any female?"

"Well, any female with the ability to announce a wish." Peacock explained. "Although I never understood why it never worked for males…maybe it's because our gods are all female," she wondered out-loud. "Not that I really believe in the Trinity and stuff."

Nick cleared his throat to make Patricia return to her original idea. "So, the Skullgirl…"

"Oh yeah, well… as you may have guess, this artifact is very dangerous and cannot be destroyed." Nick nodded, if it could be destroyed that easily, someone would've done so by now. "Even so, entire wars had been fought over the possession of the heart, and it was during the most recent war that I was born. According to the

History books, it was the bloodiest war ever waged by the Canopy Kingdom with the surrounding countries. Then the Queen of Canopy, Nancy Renoir used the heart to wish for peace. Her wish was granted, there was peace in the three kingdoms…only after they had to unite forces to defeat a greater enemy, the Queen herself who had transformed into the most powerful Skullgirl yet."

"So the heart grants Monkey Paw wishes…"

"Anyways, I hailed from an area outside of the Canopy Kingdom known as No-Man's Land, a wasteland that used to be a country but fell during the war with Canopy. And because of the war, I grew up as an orphan alongside my best friend Marie, Marie Korbel."

Peacock then stop for a second to take another puff from her cigar. Nick could imagine how difficult this next part was for her. During his life and all the wars he had witnessed, he had seen what the horrible consequences war brought, especially to children.

"We both ended up in a living in an old mansion that was turned into a makeshift orphanage that housed all sorts of war orphans. We both used to dress as maids, since the house used to belong to a nobleman and we had to use what we could find. I never liked to wear that thing, but Marie loved it, it made her look more mature and made the other kids listen to her…"

Nick cleared his throat once more, to prevent her from trailing off.

"Well, we lived like that for a while and it was a decent life, but one day the orphanage was invaded by slave traders who killed our caretakers and captured all of us orphans. These slave traders worked for the Medici Mafia from the Canopy Kingdom and they were planning to sell us for a profit... Of course us girls were worth a whole lot more."

Fury didn't say anything, but the grip on his cigar got a little tighter. It was another horrifying truth for countries devastated by war.

"As we neared Canopy where they were going to store us before they shipped us to who-knows-where, I stood up for all of us foolishly thinking that between all of us we could take them out. Unfortunately, the rest wussed out and the traders decided to make an example out of me." Peacock then put away her cigar before lighting another one.

"They beat me up real good; they broke both of my arms and legs, leaving me crippled. But that wasn't all, after they pulled out all of my teeth."Peacock gave Fury a smile to show her metallic smile. "As the cherry on top of a turd sundae, one of the traders grabbed my face, made my look at him and then plunged both of his thumbs into my eyes and ripped them out of my eye sockets." Once again Peacock let the puff of the cigar came out from the empty sockets from her face.

"I don't know what happened then or where they dumped my mutilated body, but I have the fortune to be found by this nice, slightly kooky scientist that decided to experiment on my half dead corpse and turn me into what I am today! An anti-skullgirl superweapon, named Project Peacock!" She said with a frankly crazed but honest smile. "And now I am all better, thanks to the Doc."

Nick now understood where her crazy behavior came from. He had seen some shit back on the old days and he had been personally subjected to torture before, but to survive what this girl told him and at such a young age, it was a wonder that she wasn't worse than she was.

"So? What now, Nick?" Peacock asked him after he was silent for a whole minute after the end of her tale.

"That depends…" Nick said pensively. "As you have confessed, you are a super weapon. I may not know what you are capable off, but that doesn't matter, you are too dangerous to be let loose wandering around the city."

"Can blame you for that, I'm pretty strong if I say so myself!" Peacock praised herself. "But I'm sensing there is a 'but' coming in… hehehe, butt."

"But, you can prove yourself useful as an operative for SHIELD." Sadly, it wouldn't be the first time this organization hired the skills of a superpowered nutcase before, and that wasn't taking the Loops into account.

"I don't know… I have a record back home that says I have a big trouble with authority!" Mostly she did what she want and just followed orders when she felt like it. "Besides, I want to see what is on TV in this world. I doubt you'll have 'Annie: Girl of the Stars' but I'm sure there might me something cool airing."

"You won't be a formal operative," Nick explained. "We will provide you with some monetary compensation for whatever job you do for us, and access to some weaponry and intel."

"So, like a Merc?"

"Yes, but I will remind you that if get in trouble under your own volition, Shield will not recognize you as one of your own and we are not obligated to bail you out," Nick explained. "So it is either the job or jail for super powered people like you."

"Hm…" Peacock thought for a minute. "Before I say anything else, I want to ask you something?"

"What is it?"

"If I accept, may I be 'unofficially' allowed to keep killing Mafia members? Because that has become sort of like a hobby to me."

Fury blinked a few times at that question before answering. "Only if you don't kill people that may have info that may be vital for SHIELD." It was the same compromise he made with Frank Castle when he invited him to join in a few missions with SHIELD.

"Very well! I accept but with only one more condition!" Peacock said raising one finger.

"What is it?" Nick wondered what else would this crazy girl could want.

"That besides paying me, you also paid the rest of my gang and squad mates," Peacock said. "Avery, Andy, Tommy, Lenny and George! My parasite and imaginary friends."

Nick looked at her as if she was more looney that he already thought she was. "Aren't you a little old to believe in imaginary friends?" that or she was talking about the voices on her head.

"You are never too old to believe in imaginary friends, as you are never too young to have Vietnam War Flashbacks!" she pointed out, "In fact I think I might have one right now!" she announced as she sat still with a crude expression on her face.

' *How the hell does she know what 'Nam is?'*

"Don't mind the boss!" said a small bird that came out of the girl's hat. "And don't mind us! Just pay us minimum wage! It is way more than the boss ever pay us! Which is nothing at all."

Nick Fury just stared at the bird wearing an exact replica of Patricia's dress and hat for just a second before shaking his head. "Very well I'll pay the rest of you too," he answered reluctantly.

' *Why did visiting Loopers always have to be so damn weird and crazy?'*

"Johnny?! Johnny?! JOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOHNNNYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!" Peacock screamed as she finished her 'Nam Flashback.

2.2 (con't) XeroM52

"Peacock's House of Horror?" Two goons looking for a good time read as they walked down the street. "What do you say, Lawrance? Wanna go in?" The taller of the two asked.

"No. Haunted Houses are stupid, Riccardo!" Lawrance, the chubbier of the two, rejected the idea.

"Oh come on! Don't tell me you're scared," Riccardo teased his partner in crime.

"No! I just think they are just for dumb little kids, you know!" Lawrance denied. "Don't tell me you wanna go in?"

"Yeah," the taller admitted. "There are probably girls in there that may need a pair of tough guys to lead them thru." He elbowed his partner wiggling his eyebrows. "You know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I know what you mean…and I liked it!" It was a great opportunity to pick up some nice young girls to spend the night with.

The two goons didn't waste any more time and entered the house.

Like they had expected it was mad creepy inside. But for two 'tough' guys who worked for the mafia, it was all child's play. But what they didn't expect was the massive quantity of gore.

"Wow…Like at all this crap." Lawrence said as he looked at all the gory displays. "Damn, it almost look real," he said as he picked the guts of a 'zombie'. "Man, the guy who made this, really must have some serious cash." Or a really disturbing fascination.

"I know…" Riccardo agree as he picked up a bloody skull. "Damn, feels authentic too." Too damn authentic, it was giving him the creeps.

Suddenly a bunch of girly screams startled the two of them.

"What was that!?" Riccardo shouted as he dropped the skull.

"That must be some chicks," Lawrence said. "Come! Let's go towards them."

The two goons ran past all sort of gory displays, ignoring them since they were more focused in chasing some skirt. Miniskirts preferably. They march led them to a lighted room that had nothing inside.

"Hey! Where're all the girls?" Lawrence asked to his partner before a small figure jumped in front of them and sucker punched them right in the gut.

"Hello there fellas!" the figure, who turned out to be a young little girl, said with a metallic looking smirk on her face. "Now empty your pockets and give me all of your cash and valuables!"

"Fuc…" Lawrence was going to say something but he was interrupted by another strike, this time in the nose and with the butt of a gun "GAH!"

"Now, now, fellas! No need for such language." Peacock said as he pointed the gun at them. "Just give us them Bones and we will let you go!" As she said this more figures appeared from the shadows and surrounded the two of them.

"You better do what the boss said." Andy said while cracking his knuckles.

"SQUAK, give us the Bones!" Avery tried to look mincing by flipping in and out a switchblade.

"Yeah, Give them to us or we'll murderize you!" Tommy said ever so eloquently.

"…" "…" Completing the circle were both Lenny and George who couldn't talk but they posed and waved their arms menacingly.

"Ok, Ok! Just don't punch my face!" Riccardo pleaded as he took out his wallet. But his partner with a bleeding nose stopped him.

"We don't have to give them crap!" Lawrence shot angrily. "Don't you idiots know who we work for? We are part of the Medici!" he said hoping to instill fear on their assailants.

"You don't say!" Peacock answered with a gleeful and frankly creepy smirk. "You should've said it soon!" she said waving a finger at them. "In Peacock's House of Horror, we offer the Medici and their associates a special treat. Don't we, Marie?"

"Exactly," answered a creepy white haired girl in a bloody maid outfit, who just suddenly appeared standing behind them. "They get to be part of our Horror show…." She smiled menacingly. "…as displays."

It was just then when both Riccardo's and Lawrence's lives came to an painful end. But their memories would live on in the minds of many as the heads beneath the silver platters in the spooky dining room.

"I have lots of fun tonight." Peacock said as she and Marie sat beneath a tree with a hanged-man 'decoration', while eating some candy.

"Yeah, me too." Marie said as she rested her head on Patricia's shoulder. "This Halloween was truly special."

"That it was." Peacock agreed as she chomped down on another chocolate bar which had a rusty blade inside. Yay! Free prize! "Let's do this every Halloween." Or more specifically, every Loop in which their world celebrated Halloween.

"That would be nice." Marie said as she too bit on a piece of Candy, but this one had poison on it.

"Happy Halloween, Marie."

"Happy Halloween, Patricia."

2.3 (con't) XeroM52

Around 20 minutes in, Peacock turned to Marie and asked, "Ne… Marie? You remember how some loops exists within others as fiction, right?"

"Yes, I remember. Why?" Marie asked curious as to why she brought this up.

"Well, that got me thinking…" Peacock trailed off for a second. "Do you think Annie could be a Looper, and that her cartoons, movies, and videogames are just parts of her Loops?"

"I don't know…" Marie answered frankly. "That would mean there is another Loop out there that has Skullgirls." With Annie and Sagan being a Skullgirls hunters and all.

"I guess I'm just saying dumb things again…" Peacock said, disappointed that Annie was just a Cartoon character played by an actress in their world, and that there was no Annie: Girls of the Stars, out there having adventures.

Meanwhile in space.

"Come on Sagan! We have to defeat the Alien Armada before they reach our world!" TV and Voice Actress Annie from Annie: Girl from the Stars, secret Skullgirl Hunter, protector of the world, and Stealth Anchor for her world Loops, said to her Remote Parasite and partner Sagan, who just nodded in Agreement.

"SHOOTING STAR BEAM!"

"I don't think it's dumb…" Marie said softly. "It could probably happen… with the multiverse being infinite, there's the possibility that one day you could meet a Looping version of Annie. Then maybe you can stop hanging around me so much."

"What are you saying? When I meet Annie you'll be right next to me and the three of us are going to have an adventure." Peacock said as she put her arm around Marie and brought her closer to her. "You and me, we are a team."

"Patricia…!" Marie fought the embrace of her friend and tried to move away to no avail. "Patricia…" Marie repeated again sounding really tired. "What are we doing…?"

"Besides, watching a movie after kinda kidnapping the princess of our Kingdom by pretending to her parents?" Peacock answer jokingly trying to make her friend laugh.

"No… I mean, you and I… today… why? Why today?" the white haired girl managed to asked, despite not been sure what answer she was seeking.

"Mm? I just wanted to us to have fun by doing something you enjoy," Peacock said earning a questioning look from Marie. "I mean, do you remember back when we were in the orphanage? What we use to do when we finished our chores?"

"Yes. We played games together and with the other kids." The Skullgirl could still recall those days, thought it wasn't a carefree life they were still fond memories.

"Remember when we played House and we pretended to be grown-ups? What role did everyone make you play?"

"I was always the mom," she recalled.

"Exactly. For many of the kiddies back then you were the closest thing to a mom besides the care-takers. Everyone listened to you

and everyone went for you when they were scared on in trouble. And I know how you enjoyed it, being looked up like that, because it made you feel like part of a big family," Peacock explained, making Marie teary eyed for a second. "When I saw you with the kid back there, I remember the fun times we had when you were the mom so I thought: why not play house again?"

By the time she was finished, the usually cool headed Marie, who rarely showed much emotion, was already crying. "P..Patricia.…" She sobbed; something she hadn't done in a long time.

"Shh… It's fine, it's fine! Let it all out!" Peacock patted the sobbing girl on the back trying to console her. In the back of her mind she remembered doing this exact same thing many years ago when they were on the Orphanage. While Marie had always been the most 'Mature' of the two, she was also the most emotional. At least it was like that before fate separated them and made them into what they were today; a Skullgirl and a Weapon designed to destroy them.

With the movie totally forgotten, they remained embraced on the couch for a while, as Marie slowly calmed down. They remained in total silence until Marie finally decided to speak again.

"So…why did you decide to play the Father?" she asked surprising Peacock who wasn't expecting that question. "You were always the aunt, never the father," Marie remembered from the times they played.

"Well, isn't it obvious?" Peacock answered as she took off one of her gloves to expose the thin metallic hand underneath. "I distinctly remember making a promise back then…" she said as she took Marie's pinkie finger with her own. "No matter what, Patricia and Marie, together forever, till the ends of days," she repeated the oath they made so many years ago. "Before the Loops, I thought I've broken this promise, but thanks to them I have another chance to keep this promise to you."

Once again Marie was moved by her words. "Patricia…I…I lo…" But before she could finish Peacock silenced her by placing one of her fingers in Marie's lips.

"I know," she said with a small smile. "I do too."

Then the sounds of footsteps were heard rumbling from the second floor. A few seconds later, Umbrella had come downstairs and into the living room. "Mama… I had a nightmare…"

"It's okay." Marie reassured her. "Come on, let's go back up. We'll sleep together so that Nightmares can't get to you."

"What about Daddy? Is he coming too?"

"Sure, the movie's already over." Peacock pointed to the TV which had gone back to the menu screen after the movie ended. "Come on, let's go get some sleep."

And with that, the 'family' walked up the stairs and get in bed together, the three of them enjoying a good night's sleep.

2.7 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Castlevania]

Soma Cruz 'awoke' once again inside a coffin, which wasn't weird at all, but what was weird was that this time his awakening was caused by the loud sounds of a vacuum.

Stepping out of his coffin, Soma noticed a maid vacuuming his main chambers.

"My deep apologies Lord Dracula, did I wake you from your slumber?" The maid and turned bowed to him.

Then Soma realized something about the maid. "Hey, you aren't the usual one!" he said, referring to Persephone, the demonic maid of Dracula. "Are you a Looper?"

"Indeed." The small maid nodded. "My name is Marie Korbel, but people often refer to me as Bloody Marie," Marie introduced herself very politely. "It is my pleasure to serve you Lord Dracula."

"No, No, no need for that!" Soma waved his arms. "Just call me Soma, Soma Cruz!" he introduced himself.

"Nice to serve you Master Cruz!" Marie bowed again. "If you may excuse I shall return to my cleaning duties."

"Hey, wait up!" Soma stopped her. "You don't have to serve me! We are both Loopers, so there is no need to go to such extremes to keep up the charade."

"Sorry, but don't mind yourself with me, Master Cruz! Cleaning keeps my mind off of things," Marie said and once more returned to her vacuuming. "Besides, now that I don't have to kill you, I don't have anything else to do."

"Eh…Good to know…" Soma said with a nervous smile. Somehow, despite him been used to be surrounded by bloodthirsty monsters and demons, this little maid managed to give him the creeps with the nonchalant manner she spoke of murdering him. "Although I have to warn you, these Loops will sometimes last a while."

"Well, it is a very big castle."

Compiler's Commentary:

2.1: Squirrels, Superheroes, and Storytime. Peacock, welcome to the Multiverse.

2.2: How would halloween be any different then a usual day in New Meridian? The only thing I can think of is the candy!

2.3: Sometimes a family is a princess, a lich, and a cyborg who are all little girls and two-thirds bloodthirsty killers.

2.4: You know, when you think about it, fighting games are basically digital wrestling competitions...

2.5: Yeah, part of being a compiler is accepting snips you feel really uncomfortable with.

2.6: She's certainly loony enough.

2.7: We all have our own ways of relaxing.

And of course, fair reader, should you wish to contribute your own snip, you are welcome to join us on the Indie Games Infinite Loops thread over on Spacebattles.

You Could Use A Break

As the loops go on, new loopers will activate and join in the fractured eternities. This can be a good thing... or, rarely, a bad thing. But what's done cannot be undone, even in the loops, and so the loopers have to ease their new friends in and help them the best they can...

3.1 Masterweaver

Time travel wasn't exactly an unknown concept to Ben Birdland. A fictional one, for the most part, but with the Skullheart being only one of many magical artifacts the idea of 'going back to fix things' had long been bouncing around the collective consciousness of society, and calling anything impossible after what he'd seen in the Anti-Skullgirls labs struck him as disingenuous. Still, he would have expected... something. A flashy portal, a mysterious woman, a darkly glowing gem. Not just being up and plopped a year back for a coda without warning.

Still, he had warning this time around-enough to avoid the fights he had fought before and head straight for the cathedral, where he took on that shapeshifting nun and her traitorous nurse partner. It was much easier this time, knowing all their tricks and moves; he left them both beaten and bruised, before turning to the crypt.

But before he could reach for the doors, it was opened from the other side... revealing Peacock and the skullgirl, hands around each other's waists.

The three of them stared at each other for a moment.

"Uuuuuuuh..." Peacock raised a cartoonish finger. "It's not what it looks like?"

The skullgirl facepalmed. "Patricia, it is *entirely* what it looks like."

"Nah, I wasn't talking about us, I was talking about, you know, the... whole... I can explain!" Peacock tried.

The skullgirl gave a long suffering look to the massive cyborg. "She falls back on tropes when she's panicked, you know."

Ben shook himself out of his shock, bracing himself for the upcoming fight. "Save your breath, skullgirl. You will be prosecuted to the full extent of the jam."

"Hey, Big Band, Marie ain't gonna hurt nobody-!"

The skullgirl sighed, taking her hand from Peacock's waist and putting it on her shoulder. "He's not going to listen. You know that."

Peacock crossed her arms with a sullen pout. "I don't wanna see my father figure fightin' my girlfriend."

"I know, I know-look, I'm not going to beat him up too badly, alright? You just be ready to take him back to lab 8."

"Yeah, yeah." Peacock grumpily marched over to one of the pews and slapped herself down.

Ben looked at her in confusion, before turning back to the skullgirl. "Girlfriend?"

"Yes, I know, it is a little strange. What with our age, and us both being girls, and me being a lich and her being a cyborg specifically designed to kill me..." The skullgirl shrugged. "Okay, it's terribly strange, but in this screwed up world of ours, what isn't?" She coughed awkwardly. "We, uh. We're still only at the kissing stage. If that's what you're worried about."

Ben said nothing for a moment or two.

"...So." The skullgirl took a stance. "Prepare to get swept up, I suppose."

"You were a lot more enthusiastic the last time I fought ya."

The skullgirl's eyes snapped wide. "You're looping?!" she cried- before she was plowed over by Ben's charge.

In the pews, Peacock facepalmed. "Well, crud. This is going to be a hell of an explanation. Oy! Big Band! We're time traveling too!"

It had taken an embarrassingly short amount of time for the skullgirl to recover from her surprise and restrain Ben in a number of bones. The fact that she had not done anything else after that, save summon a small table and tea set from thin air, was enough to catch the man's attention. She and Peacock had taken turns telling him a crazy story about a tree computer that ran the universe being broken, Peacock had shown him pictures of herself in places that never existed, and the skullgirl had confirmed their authenticity by showing off her own versions Ben decided that the two of them weren't lying.

"Okay. Fine. I've got a few questions." Ben gave the two of them his most serious look. "First of all, who's the Anchor for this loop?"

Peacock took a proud whiff of her cigar. "You're lookin' at her, boyo!"

Ben quirked a brow at that. "Really."

"Patricia has been looping since before I activated," confirmed the skullgirl. "And we haven't met anyone else from this world that's time traveling."

"It's a big responsibility," Peacock said dramatically, "but I can handle it! Just gotta curb my urges a little, you know?"

Ben took a moment to consider that statement. On the one hand, Anchors sounded like they had to be mentally stable individuals, which Peacock certainly wasn't. On the other, it might be good for her to have something other than cartoons and murder to occupy her time...

"Right. Kay, so, skullheart."

"It is a thing of dangerous power and rage and if I'm not Awake you should absolutely destroy it," the skullgirl replied without hesitation. "That said, I have spent literally hundreds of years coming to understand it-its origins, methods, and powers-and I have tamed it. The only thing I kill these days is Medici scum." She shrugged. "And the occasional other horrible monstrosity."

"You're alright with me taking you down," Ben repeated.

"I've had to put her down myself," Peacock admitted. "It ain't somethin' I like, but it's gotta be done-when she's not Awake, though. Gonna have to teach you our secret signal, Big Band."

"And to be fair," the skullgirl admitted, "New Meridian forces a number of encounters that end... lethally. You can't be a part of this city and not accept the potential of death." She sighed. "At least the loops let us see who really deserves it."

Ben nodded. His time as a beat cop and eventual transformation into a massive orchestral cyborg had certainly lent him a front row seat to the worst of humanity. He couldn't rightly deny her words.

"...So. Girlfriends."

Peacock choked on her cigar.

"Yes." The skullgirl bit her lip, but didn't break her gaze. "We are."

"Not gonna lie, that is ringing a hell of a lot of warning bells."

"Look, Big Band, after the shit I've lived through I think I qualify as-"

The skullgirl held up her hand, silencing Peacock.

"...Mister Birdland, I know we're both uncomfortably young-physically, anyway. I know Patricia might not have the best judgement-no Patricia, don't object, you know it's true. I know our world isn't exactly... kind to same-sex couples. I know you only know me as the skullgirl. This... us... we both realize there are a lot of difficulties in this. And we're trying it anyway. Because we both feel the other is worth it."

She took a breath. "The thing is, we're, all three of us, stuck in this eternity together. And that means we're going to have to learn to live together. I don't... I don't want to separate Patricia from you, in any way-not even the unspoken disapproval of her romantic partner. You're important to her, and... if it's really an issue-"

"Marie-"

"-if it's really an issue," she overrode Peacock, "I'll back off."

There was silence in the church for a moment or two.

Then Ben gave a long, slow sigh. "She's been through a lot. Too much to be considered a kid anymore, but not enough to give her a chance to mature. I'm not sure Peacock's adult enough to make her own decisions, frankly, so I'm going to be watching this." He shrugged. "But the fact you're putting her thing with me over her thing with you-that says something, kid. I ain't saying yes... but I'm not saying no."

The skullgirl slowly let out a blue, misty breath. "Thank you, mister Birdland. I suppose that's the best I should expect."

"Hey, if we're going to be looping together, that means we have to be friends." The massive cyborg stuck out a tiny arm. "And my friends call me Big Band."

The skullgirl, hesitantly, took the padded gripper. "A pleasure to meet you, Big Band. I'm Marie Korbel, but my friends call me Marie."

"...So we're all cool with each other?" Peacock asked. "Everyone? Good. Let's go get some ice cream!"

3.2 Masterweaver

NO!

"NO NO NO NO NO!"

Not again not again not again not again not again no no no no no no not again not again out out out get out get out get out!

He was dead she killed him he was dead she was free she earned-

THE SKULLGIRL IS ACTIVE. KILL THE SKULLGIRL.

"GET OUT OF MY HEAD! Get-get out-"

screams as she ran, as her body ran without thinking-people parting willingly or not-

Mom dad it's me it's me why why why

-blood on her blades blood on her spikes blood on her mind-

The chapel above her, tugging at her-

"Let me go let me go I don't want to let me go-"

-she crossed the threshhold-

The nun smiled. That thing could still smile. Even as it warped into a mass of flesh, it taunted her with that smile, something she could

never do again-

Rage.

...meat everywhere. Flesh everywhere. Some still pulsating. The nurse, in a pool of red.

I did this, I did this, I did this...

Down to the crypt.

Where...?

Where was the skullgirl?

Where was the skullgirl?!

"WHERE ARE YOU?!"

Not-not fair! This was-this was why-and she wasn't-!

No.

Her blood pulled another way.

"There... there you are..."

To the streets again. Faces, horrified faces. Her reflection-hunched, maddened.

Now showing: Annie and the something something didn't matter she wasn't a kid anymore-

-there will be children, no no no no no no stay away don't make me-

KILL THE SKULLGIRL.

-a scream, escaping her throat as her body moved forward-

"RUN! EVERYBODY RUN!"

-the usher trying to hold her back, long enough for the big man to-

-he's getting the kids out thank you thank you thank you-

-her blades whirled as she jumped, flying over the massive musical hand trying to grab her, and she charged into the nearly empty movie theater.

"Must... kill..."

The skullgirl, almost... resigned. And a... a what? An annoyed cartoon girl? *What?*

KILL THE SKULLGIRL.

"SHUT UP!"

She lunged at the skullgirl and-bones, obviously bones, dodge, slice. She did this before. She could do it again-

A little bomb with legs waddled up to her.

"What?"

It exploded.

She was thrown back a few rows, but that-that didn't stop her, no. She bent back, red eyes glaring at the two.

"I-I'll kill you. I have to kill you."

"I know." The skullgirl-sad? "I'm sorry."

She... what?

"If you do," she warned, "don't take the skullheart. It's-"

"It didn't take me before, it won't take me now." Her fingers ripped into the cushions of the chairs. "I will be free again!"

She only just noticed the look of shock as she jumped for her-

-five skeletal whips wrapping around her limbs and Buer Drive-

"Have you fought me before?"

She struggled, snapping her limbs as she screamed in a desperate attempt to break free-

"Have you fought me before?!" demanded the skullgirl. "Yes or no, have we fought?!"

"LET ME GO!" The metal spurs of Gae Bolga spurred in and out of her body-

"ANSWER ME!"

"GRRRRR..." She pulled her arm free of a spinal column. *"YES!"*

And then her world was overwhelming ringing and darkness.

Big Band, carefully, pulled back the massive bell and folded it into his body. "There. She shouldn't wake up from that for a while."

"We totally could have taken her," Peacock stated. "Still, you know, thanks for that."

"She's looping."

The two of them turned to Marie.

"I asked her if she'd fought me before, and she said yes." Marie sighed. "So, she's... looping."

Peacock snorted. "This is the second time one of our dates has been interrupted by a new looper. What, is that going to be a theme?"

Marie shot her a look. "Patricia, this is serious."

"Yeah, I getcha, we gotta get this girl introed to the loops and all-"

"No, you don't understand. You know what the Medicis did to you? Of all the people who I've fought in whatever Baseline's supposed to be, this girl is the only one that I'd say had it *worse* ."

Peacock did a doubletake. "Wait, seriously?"

"I don't know what it is-the others who fight me either want the skullheart or to put down the skullgirl, they *choose* to come at me. This one..." Marie looked down at the girl, trembling even as she slept. "This one has... a compulsion. And you saw how she fought. She's going to need help."

"I can do that," Big Band said quietly. "I recognize her, I've helped her before."

"Good. Because I don't think I'd be any help."

"You can go to Lab 0 and kill the guy trying to mind control her."

"...You'd be okay with that?"

Big Band snorted. "Only person I know that's worse is Eliza. Even that's a toss-up."

"...I don't know," Marie said slowly. "That's an anti-skullgirl lab, and me being what I am-"

"I'll handle it, toots." Peacock shrugged. "You just get yourself ready for our next date."

"...Probably in the Dragon Empire," Marie replied. "I don't think I should be anywhere close while she's recovering."

"Fair enough. Shoot me a telegram when you get us a place, alright?"

"Alright. And... Ben." Marie paused. "...tell her I am sorry. For all of it."

"It's not your fault."

"No." Marie's hands brushed against her exposed ribs. "But I am part of the problem."

3.3 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][D.C.]

Dick Grayson Awoke in a familiar yet strange predicament. First of all, he was Batman; not as him taking the mantle of Batman after Bruce's supposed Death, no. He was the sole heir of the 'Grayson's family' fortune after his parents were shot in Crime Alley when he was a kid. So basically he and Bruce just swapped places.

The second strange thing was where he was currently.

Dick had awoken on his way back to the Batmobile which was parked in Crime Alley. Now for those who were familiar with the scenario, that would mean that Batman was going to have his encounter with Jason Todd trying to steal the tires of the Batmobile. Except that the date was completely wrong, if Dick's in-loop memories were to be believed; today was the day Batman was supposed to meet the first Robin. So why was he in Crime Alley?

' *Maybe a weird variation where Todd is the first Robin, perhaps?* ' Dick thought offhandedly. It was possible and it wouldn't be the strangest variation to ever happen to him. As he turned the corner to Crime Alley, his eyes fell upon a strange figure on top of the Batmobile. ' *That is definitely not Todd!* '

Dick remained calm as he observed the figure. By body structure, Dick could tell the figure was 'female' and a young one at that, probably around 13, but he still wasn't sure if it was completely human. The main source of his confusion was the strange contraption on her back. It looked like a gigantic metallic pinwheel, very sharp looking, connected to the base of the spine. The second thing that confused him was the lack of facial features, only to realize she was wearing some sort of strange mask on her face. Another unusual feature were those big red eyes hers that seemed to illuminate inside the darkness.

' *She must be a Looper* ,' Dick concluded, but if she was friendly or even mentally stable remained to be seen. ' *How should I approach this* ?' After all his time in the Loops, Dick was very strong, but underestimating a possible threat was never a good idea. ' *If she* is *a threat* .' Dick decided to gamble and decided to approach her, but before doing so, he had to at least lose the bat mask, it wouldn't make him any favors if he scared her by looking like a giant bat.

So after losing the mask, replacing it with a more familiar domino mask, he made his presence known.

"WHO'S THERE?" the 'girl' growled as she turned towards the source of a noise that startled her and found Dick wearing the bat suit. "WHO ARE YOU?"

"Whoa, calm down," Dick said, his hands opened in the air to make himself look less threatening.

"STAY AWAY!" she growled again, "OR YOU'LL GET HURT"

Dick could detect a small hint of fear underline her words. ' *Is she afraid that I would attack her, or she's afraid that she'll hurt me?* ' he wondered. "I will not take another step forwards," Dick said. "But I want to have a talk with you?"

"TALK?" She screeched. "THERE IS NOTHING TO TALK ABOUT!"

"Of course there is." Dick tried to remained calm and sound chipper. "We could tell each other our names. My name is Richard." He knew it was against the rules to reveal his secret identity just like that, but if he wanted to calm this girl down, honesty was the best policy.

"RI-Richard?" the girl repeated with a lower tone than her previous growls.

"Yes, Richard. But my friends call me Dick." He said smiling hoping the girl would visibly calm down. "What's yours?"

"Grr…" She just growled, but not at him. It looked like she was struggling with herself to calm down and recall.

"C-CA-Carol…"

"That's a pretty name…" Dick said with sincerity. "It is nice to meet you, Carol."

"NICE…to meet you too…" Carol struggled to say, but it seemed that greeting had the effect Dick wanted, she was finally calming down.

"Now, that we know each other, I wish to ask you something, Carol," Dick began slowly. "That is if it is ok with you."

"Wh-what…?" she granted him permission to ask.

"Carol, I want to know if you are currently lost," Dick began. "Does this place look different to your home?"

He tried to ask as neatly as possible, but it seemed that his question rubbed Carol the wrong way, because she started tensing once more.

"I DON'T HAVE A HOME, ANYMORE!" Carol shouted in anger. "BECAUSE I AM A MONSTER!"

"Carol! Calm down!" Dick tried to reason but it look like the peaceful conversation was no longer an option.

"SCREW YOU!" she yelled as she launched herself towards him. Had it been just her, it would've been fine because he doubted a petite girl like her could even have enough strength to tackle him down; except that it wasn't just her, she also attacked with the metallic pinwheel connected to her spine which started rotating and buzzing at great speed, not unlike a chainsaw.

"Crap!" he cursed, but he managed to avoid the blade completely. Still, Carol wasn't over.

"PAIN!" She shouted as she pointed her arm towards his direction. Then her slender arm began bulging out unnaturally until black spines started crawling from under her skin, which shot out similar to bullets.

' *Wow, didn't expect that one,'* Dick thought as he dodged the bullet-like projectiles. *'Still, I have to attack now that she is wide open!'* In the blink of an eye, the dark crusader closed the distance between the two, readying an attack to put her out of commission.

"GET AWAY!" Carol growled as black sharp blade tendrils shot out of her body, preventing Dick from delivering his blow.

' *Who does this girl think she is? Kimimaro?* ' No doubt about it, that black substance that shots out of her body in the form of sharp objects was really similar to that of the Bloodline limit user that could manipulate his own skeletal structure; except this girl was also equipped with a chainsaw-like pinwheel on her back. *'If physical combat is out of the way, then I'll have to fight long range!'* Dick decided and then released small pellets that exploded in a gas that would knockout anyone. But Carol remained unaffected. *'Was it not enough or is she immune?'* He didn't have time to ponder that question since he had to dodge again to prevent been sawn in half.

"STOP MOVING!" Carol shouted as Dick rolled and jumped out of the way of her attacks.

' *Need more space!'* Dick thought before jumping off the walls of the alley to gain the higher ground and attack from the roof.

"THERE'S NO ESCAPE!" Carol exclaimed as she used the rotating blades of her pinwheel to hover and elevate from the ground as if she was a helicopter.

' *Ok, now that is just a blatant disregard of physics* .' Then again, considering what he did and whom he hung around most of the time, breaking the laws of the universe shouldn't really bother him that much.

"Carol! Please, I don't wish to fight you!" He knew his words wouldn't help much but he just had to try. "If we just calm down, we can resolve this peacefully."

"LIAR!" she accused as she dropped down to all fours on top of the roof. "THEY ALWAYS WANT TO HURT ME!"

"They? Who are they?"

"EVERYONE!" she screeched angrily. "THEY ALL THINK I'M A MONSTER!"

"I don't think you are a monster, Carol," Dick reasoned back despite the girl's current actions. "You have a pretty name. Girls with pretty names aren't monsters." Not exactly his best line of dialogue ever, not to mention the flawed logic behind his words, but the thought still counts, right?

"RRRRRAAAAAWWWWWHHHHHHHHHHHH!" Carol roared to the sky as her pinwheel buzzed with more intensity.

' *Looks like she didn't like my comment at all.* ' Having failed once again to calm down the girl, he had no other option but to use a little bit of 'extreme force' to put her down. He had some gadgets that he developed to deal some of the more 'troublesome' super villains he encountered. "Sorry Carol, but right now you are a menace to

others, but mostly to yourself." Who knew what kind of trouble she would get into if he hadn't met her when he did?

"FEEL MY PAIN!" Carol shouted once more, launching herself towards Dick, but before he could even retaliate, a smooth but deep voice called out behind him.

"MOVE OUT OF THE WAY, SON!"

Dick, moving out of instinct, did exactly that. Once he was out of harm's way, he watched how a big figure came down and trapped Carol inside a giant bell.

' *Guess, this night isn't near over yet.* ' Dick thought before he decided to confront this new person. "Hey, who…"

"This ain't over yet!" the man, who was dressed in a trench coat, right out of a detective flick, interrupted him. Then, the same black tendrils pierced the bell, filling it with lots and lots of holes. "I'll finish this."

"Wait, what are you…?" But once again he was interrupted but this time by the music that originated from the musical instruments that came from beneath the trench coat. *'A man made out of musical instruments?'* Dick was sure he wasn't going to see something that impressive for the rest of the night.

The melody that the one man band cyborg played was very soothing, but at the same time it felt a little sad too. Then the melody was finished, the giant bell opened by falling apart revealing Carol sitting on the floor, looking completely calm.

"B…Ben…" she uttered in a soft voice, very unlike her growls and screeches from before.

"Yes, kid. I'm right here." The man identified as Ben walked towards the downed girl and kneeled besides her. "How're you holding?" he asked in a paternal manner, which Carol responded by burying her

face in his coat crying tears. "There, there. Let it all out, I'm here for you."

Dick remained silent as he watched the whole scene, not wanting to interrupt. After a few minutes, Carol finally stopped crying as she drifted into sleep, completely drained by the whole fight.

"Hey, you are Batman, correct?" Ben asked as he turned to look at Dick.

"Yes…" Dick responded disguising his slight confusion. Usually Looper recognized him as Nightwing or the first robin; and from what he had seen Ben must also be a Looper, if Carol's reaction to him was any indication, but he asked if he was Batman and not Nightwing. ' *He must be a fairly new one…* ' he concluded. "How did you know that?"

"Because I seem to have Looped as a replacement for a person that call himself The Question."

' *Ah, so that explains it!* ' Ben must have recognized him as Batman thanks to his own in-loop memories, but that raised another question. "I have met The Question before, you don't look like him." At least that was what his in-loop memories told him.

"That is because I'm just assuming my 'real' body." Ben explained as he started shrinking and changing his body to that of The Question Dick remembered. "I woke up like this, which was nice since I been forgetting how it feels to have a body that isn't 90% metal," he said almost jokingly. "But thanks to a previous Loop, I have learned to change my body at will." It really came in handy when he wanted to go unnoticed.

' *Thanks for the spell, Louise,* ' he mentally thanked the pink haired mage that had been his 'master' for an entire Loop.

"I see…" Dick commented, accepting Ben's explanation. "Nice to meet you, Ben. Welcome to the DC Loops," he greeted.

"Thanks," Ben said,"Also, I think it is for the best if you just keep calling me The Question, while i'm in this form."

"Ok, then but how should I call you when you're in your 'real' form?" Dick asked

"Call me Big Band."

'Big Band?' Oddly fitting.

"I know it is sudden but can I ask you for your help?" Big Band/The Question began "I need a safe place where I can take and help Carol."

"We could take her to the Batcave…" Dick offered, it was the nearest and safest place he could think of on the top of his head. Besides he and Ben needed to have a LONG talk and exchange Loop info.

"Thank you very much." Ben said sincerely as he picked up Carol and carried her.

"Come, I'll have Alfred prepare the cave and rooms for the two of you." He only hoped the butler was 'awake' too.

And with that, the three of them made their way to the Batcave.

3.4 Masterweaver

"So hey, Big Band." Peacock leaned against a doorframe, her hands crossed. "Ya wanna do something... loopy?"

The large man, more orchestral than human, gave her a baleful look. "Is that really how we tell each other we're looping?"

"It's an easy code to pick up on, which can't be interpreted easily by those not in the know." Peacock took a whiff of her cigar. "Seriously, I'm bored and Marie's not Awake, so I'm gonna have to snuff her and

then probably paint the town with Medici blood. Oh, hey, we could check on Painwheel-"

"Carol."

"Carol, right... Look, my point is we're both looping and I'm thinkin' we should do something together." Peacock started counting off on her fingers. "We could have a family picnic with all the lab 8 kids, or we could go see a movie, or... I dunno. Start up the band, maybe?"

"...you could use some string lessons," Big Band mused. "You're terrible on the banjo."

"Hey! My banjo skills are incomparable!"

"That's certainly true. I've never heard anything quite like your playing."

Peacock smirked. "Yeah."

"I spend my time listening to actual music."

Avrey popped out of Peacock's hat. "He's gotcha there, boss!"

Peacock smacked the tiny bird back into his resting place with a snarl. "Well what about you, ya big palooka? I don't see you whippin' out a guitar any time you want!"

"Ain't got the hands for it, kid." Big Band glanced away. "I could take care of Marie, if you-"

"Nah. I'm the Anchor, she's my loopin' girlfriend, and she made her wish for me. That makes her my responsibility three times over. You go beat Brain Drain to a pulp and find Carol, I'll take out the Skullheart, then we'll meet back up and I can show ya how to really pluck a tune."

"Murder and torture, two world-reknowned hobbies." Big Band caught the teacup Peacock tossed at him in a tiny padded gripper.

"It'll take me a bit to get Carol settled into a safe place. Let's meet back here in a week."

"Yeah, yeah. Hey, give her a head-pat from me, kay?" Peacock rubbed one of her arms. "Us torn up gals gotta stick together, you know."

Big Band nodded. "Maybe you should talk to her, next time you're both Awake."

"...Yeah. I should." Peacock took a final whiff of her cigar and put it out. "Catch you later, Big Band." With a tip of her hat, she rocketed out a window.

3.5 Masterweaver

She stopped, staring at the wreckage of the laboratory, the corpses and shattered technology clearly indicating an assault and easily explaining why the voices in her head had stopped. The tugging of her blood, well, that made the perpetrator almost completely certain- and as she hesitantly crawled through the flotsam, she found more and more evidence, bone spurs and skulls and still mobile skeletons working on cleaning up some of the more dangerous remains.

When she entered the central chamber, though, she couldn't help but pause.

"...Patricia and I have a code for when she's Awake, and Big Band- Ben, well, he confronts me early when he is before he goes to find you." Marie's shoulders sagged. "So when I heard your ping, I... I thought, this was the least I could do. I'm the reason they did this to you, after all, and... I'm sorry." She turned around. "I'll go now, let you-"

"NO!"

The shout surprised both Skullgirl, and skullgirl weapon.

"...no," Carol repeated. "S...stay. You... know. Nobody else does." Her glowing eyes fell to the ground. "Nobody else... would."

Marie nodded. "...alright." She glanced around. "...I'm... going to conjure up some bone furniture. A table, a couple of chairs. Is that okay?"

Carol nodded.

"Okay." Marie shut her eyes, bringing her hands together. Femurs and tibias and ribs and spines gathered from various locations, hovering around her for a moment before settling into a small tea table and a pair of chairs. "Do you... like tea?"

"I... used to." Carol, hesitantly, scrawled over. "Before..."

"Right." Marie gently sat down in one of the bone chairs. "I... do have a teaset in my subspace pocket."

Carol tilted her head quizzically.

"Subspace pocket," Marie explained. "It's... a trick loopers learn. We can use our soul to carry things between iterations, between loops."

"...useful." Carol scrambled onto the chair. "...t...tea."

Marie nodded, gently taking out the tea set and putting it on the table. "Something... soft. Aromatic. Jasmine?"

"Yes." She paused. "Thank... you."

Marie managed a small smile as she prepared the tea. "You're welcome." She poured the drink into the two cups.

For a moment, they simply stared at them.

"...I, ah." Marie tapped her knee. "Being... what I am. It takes some effort to consume and drink food and beverages. I, uh, have to focus my power on it."

"...drink... I can... drink." Carol stared at her cup. "Just... have to take off the mask first."

"Right. Well... at least it smells nice."

"...yes. Good smell."

There was silence.

"...you know, I don't know if you ever heard about why I took the skullheart in the first place." Marie took a misty breath. "I was an orphan-well, me and Patricia were, we lost our parents in the war. We were living in no-man's land, an abandoned mansion had been adapted to be a makeshift orphanage, and... well, the Medici clan thought a bunch of kids would make great slave trade. Came and gathered us up. Patricia, of course, she wouldn't stand for that, so... she tried to go up against them." A small, sad smile flickered on her face. "One little girl against brutal mafia slavers."

Carol looked up at her. "That... went bad?"

Marie pursed her lips. "...you've seen what she's like now. Lab 8 found her and replaced what the mafia took-well, physically, anyway. Couldn't do anything for her eyes, she sees out of the ones on her arms these days. That, though, what they did to her... that's what made me seek out the skullheart. Just so I could get back at the Medicis. For... kidnapping us, and breaking my friend."

"Oh." Carol looked down at the tea. "That makes... sense."

They sat quietly for another few minutes.

Then, a sound. A hacking, coughing sound.

Marie gave Carol a look of concern. "Is... something wrong?"

"Us." Carol looked up. "Two monsters. Sharing tea. Tea we can't even drink."

"Oh. Yes. It is... odd, isn't it." Marie wrung her hands. "Then again, a lot of what happens in this world is... odd."

"Yes." The blades attached to her spine swished. "I... don't talk much. It... hurts. My body and... and my mind, it hurts when I talk."

"That's okay. I don't mind."

"I'd... like to talk more. But... not yet." Carol clutched her skull. "There's so much... it all hurts, I can't... focus. It's hard to think."

"...The skullheart whispers to me. Always wants me to tear things apart."

"He-he always tells me to kill. Kill the skullgirl, kill the nurse, kill anyone in the way... I don't... like it." Carol looked up. "I know he's dead, but... he's not gone, yet."

Marie nodded. "It... took me a while to tame the skullheart. But with the loops, I did figure it out." She looked over at a slumped corpse. "I... I really hope you'll find a way."

"Yes." Carol nodded. "Yes... I want... to drink tea again..."

3.3 (con't) XeroM52

After putting Carol on a bed so she could rest-thankfully Alfred was Awake so Dick didn't have to worry to come up with an elaborate explanation-Dick and Big Band/The Question decided to have a chat about the cyborg's loop.

"In my world, there exists an ancient artifact known as the SkullHeart; we don't know where it came from or since when it has

existed, but what we know is that it's a dangerous thing."

"What does it do?" Dick asked curiously.

"It can grant a wish to any woman who possesses it," Ben answered, "but as you may guess, it comes with a catch."

"Kinda like Kyubey, then," Dick commented, much to the confusion of Ben, who didn't have any idea who that was. "Sorry, he isn't important right now. So you were saying?"

"Yes. The catch is that if the woman who makes a wish is impure of heart then the SkullHeart will transform her into a Skullgirl. A monster of great power."

Even before anyone could remember, people had fought over the heart. Entire nations had risen and fallen because of it. Ben then told Dick about the power of the Skullgirl by retelling the story of Nancy Renoir, the most powerful Skullgirl to ever exist in recent history.

Queen Nancy Renoir was the ruler of the Canopy Kingdom alongside her husband. She was a gentle ruler that wanted nothing more than to protect her citizens. But soon, Canopy was involved in a bloody war against the neighboring kingdoms. After many years of senseless war, Queen Nancy came into the possession of the SkullHeart. With it, Queen Nancy wished for the war to end and for peace to come to the three kingdoms. But despite been a gentle woman with a kind soul, the Heart had corrupted her wish since it had determine the wish to be selfish. Because of that, Queen Nancy was transformed into a Skullgirl. After she started reaping destruction indiscriminately, the three kingdoms agree to put a stop to the fighting and united against the former Queen. After Nancy was defeated, peace finally came to Canopy and what remained of the neighboring kingdoms. So in a way, Queen Nancy's wish came true.

"I see…" Dick commented. It really sounded like their world had suffered a lot because of the Heart. "Still, I don't understand what the Skullgirl has to do with you or Carol."

"Well…"

Big Band proceeded to tell Dick about the Anti-Skullgirl Labs, or ASG Labs for short. Well before the war, King Renoir, alongside every other ruler, feared the power of the SkullHeart, so he prioritized scientific advancements in order defend the Kingdom from possible Skullgirls' attacks. That was how the black-ops research institution of The Anti-Skullgirl Labs came to be. Founded by Dr. Victor Geiger, they were funded by the Canopian government with hopes of understanding the nature of the Skullgirl so they could create weapons and warriors capable of directly confronting the menace. Unfortunately, many of the kingdom's subjects were sacrificed in the labs' experiments.

Despite the clandestine manner of their work, there were good people working on the ASG Labs that really care for the people that were subjected for tests and experimentations. Big Band could attest to that because he was one of their subjects. Under the Lab designated with the named Lab 8. Dr. Avian, director of Anti-Skullgirl Lab 8, despite being a little on the crazy side, was a good man that saw each of his subjects and creations as his own family. And it was because of him that Big Band was alive.

But just like there were good people, there were also bad people working on the Labs. The clearest example of that was Lab 0 director Brain Drain who previously had been an experiment of Lab 7, the psychic division. For years, Brain Drain was free to do whatever he wanted with any subject that he managed to acquire. In fact, people said that those who spoke out against the King were severely punished by been sent to Brain Drain. But after losing his wife to the Skull Heart and the Grand War, King Renoir found himself with a stronger conscience. Despite the continuing need for the Labs in the fight against the Skullgirls, the King moved to decommission all of their experiments. Once he himself mysteriously disappeared, however, the ASG Labs were restarted in secret and the lack of official oversight allowed the Labs' scientists to perform increasingly questionable experiments.

One of their latest creations was Carol. Unlike Ben, who had accepted to be experimented on to save his life, Carol was kidnapped one night from her house by one of Brain Drain's agents, Nurse Valentine, and was experimented on against her will. What Valentine and Brain Drain did to Carol was inhumane. Sure, Lab 8 also did questionable experiments, but all of their test subjects were willing to undergo experimentation. Carol was Brain Drain's attempt to replicate what Dr. Avian had managed to do with Project Peacock. Take two Artificial Parasites and combined them into one body in such way that resulted in a 0% rate of Soul Degeneration. But where Dr. Avian managed success by his brilliant calculations and designs, Brain Drain just brute forced two incompatible parasites into one body and used Skullgirl 'blood' to held the two together.

Carol's parasites were Buer Drive and Gae Bolga. Buer Drive was the segmented spine-like cord which commanded the helicopter blades that form the 'Pinwheel' mounted on Carol's back. Through it, she controlled the motions of her blades as like a limb, enabling flight with it or selectively clashing down its individual blades. It was grafted into the center of her spine, and branched off from the blade by an appendage made up of eight segments connected by fibers underneath. Gae Bolga was the inner parasite; its true form was unknown, but it resided in Painwheel's bloodstream and when it left her body it took the form of a metal. This enabled her to release large, organic needle-like projections from various parts of her body. While doing this would normally kill the user, the Skullgirl 'blood' infused in her, prevents the injuries caused by Gae Bolga to kill her.

The strain of having to conflicting parasites and Skullgirl 'blood' inside of her made it so that Carol was in constant pain every waking moment of her life, and that wasn't mentioning the mental torture she had to endure in order for Brain Drain to brainwash her and manipulate her as if she were a mere animal.

"After I managed to rescue Carol from Brain Drain, I tried to find her a home with the rest of the Lab 8 agents, but she insisted in looking for her parents," Ben told Dick, nearing the end of his tale. "Of

course, I tried to object, but she was too headstrong and ran away. When I finally found her, she was crying her eye outs. I'm pretty sure you can guess what happened."

"Her parents must have not recognized her," Dick deduced.

"Worse, they attacked her thinking she was a monster. The monster that had took their girl away and now was back to finish the job."

"Goodness…" Dick said. He was saddened by it. By all of what poor girl must have suffered. "What happened then?"

"The Loops started," Ben said, his tone steely. "Since then I've been looking after Carol, trying to help her as one living weapon to another."

"You guys are more than that!" Dick protested. "You aren't just weapons, you are people."

"Tell that to the people who run horrified when they see her," Ben said, sounding angry. "Even in my world where parasite hosts are somewhat common, they are still mistreated and face discrimination everywhere they go, not to mention women are also viewed with distrust since any one of them has the potential to become a Skullgirl. Combine all of this and what do you get? What does it mean for Carol?"

Dick remained silent. It reminded him of what some metahumans on his world or mutants on the Marvel Universe had to suffer every day.

"I too wish it didn't have to be this way, but when she can come to terms with being what she is now; the better it would be for her."

"But with the Loops, there had to be someone that could undo-"

"I also thought of that, but it would be disastrous," Ben interrupted him. "Parasites are deeply integrated to their hosts, even beyond a mere physical level. Some say the connection can run as deep as to

the soul," he explained. "Parasites cannot be removed without killing the host. Some Artificial Parasites can be removed, somewhat, like Carol's Buer Drive, but Gae Bolga would be impossible to extract."

"So trying to extract Gae Bolga would mean to try and extract a big chunk out of her soul? That's what you're saying?" It sounded like a hopeless case, but he was sure there has to be someone out there that could help her.

"Yes," Ben confirmed with a nod. "Like I said I don't like it, but that's how it is; Carol needs to accept what she is," he said, sounding sad.

"But that doesn't mean she can't try to live a normal life at its fullest," Dick pointed out.

"What do you mean?" Ben asked curiously at the sudden cheery demeanor.

"I saw how you changed appearances. Maybe we could try and teach Carol so that she can pass off as a normal girl and not have to live in fear of others."

"It could be a possibility, but Carol's current mental state is too erratic and unbalanced for something like that to work," Ben pointed out. "You have seen her fits of rage. Only I have been able to stop her without hurting her too much."

"Maybe I can help her recover," Dick offered. "I have experience dealing with 'troubled' kids before." Damien and Jason came to mind. "I think we can rehabilitate Carol if we both worked together, that is if you think it is appropriate," he asked for permission since Big Band was the closest thing Carol had for a legal guardian.

"I'm willing to try," Ben confessed, "but aren't you too busy being Batman and the CEO of your own multibillion company?"

"It's not like I haven't done so before in previous loops," Dick reassured with a smile. "Besides, you can also help me stop

criminals, besides helping with Carol."

"Hmm…I do miss cracking cases and bringing crooks to justice." Ben hummed as he thought back to the time he was a police detective in New Meridian, before becoming a cyborg. "Let us hope that Carol agrees to this arrangement."

3.6 Masterweaver

Was it easier, tearing them apart this time?

Was it getting easier to leave their bodies rent and shattered across the floor of the laboratory?

The metal face, so cold and uncaring-she didn't know if there was a panic in it when she tore at it. She didn't know if she wanted there to be a panic in it.

The nurse... the nurse always seemed pleased...

"Whoa, ya did a number on this place toots."

She whirled, perhaps a bit too hard, her blades spinning up warningly-

"Easy!" The other girl held up her cartoonish gloves. "Easy, it's just me. You do recognize me, right?"

"You... Peacock." With a ragged breath, she stopped her blades' motion. "...looping?"

"Yep. I, uh, already handled the skullgirl." Peacock sighed. "She's not Awake so... yeah. Anyway, don't think Big Band is either, so it's you and me for the loop!" She sauntered over, reaching out to put an arm around her shoulders-

"DON'T TOUCH ME!"

Peacock blinked as the other girl scrambled back. "Uh... okay? No touching."

"I... it... they..." She shivered. "Scalpels. Everywhere."

"Oh. Trigger. Gotcha." Peacock backed up. "Okay, so, I was going to say we should have a gal-pal's night out. I mean, I'm a torn up girl on the outside, you're a torn up girl on the inside... what do you and Big Band usually do, Carol? I mean besides the trauma therapy."

"We... listen to music. Leave... leave the city." She looked away. "Go to the country."

"Camping, huh?"

"There are some nice flowers..."

"Right." Peacock tapped her chin. "Ya know, I'm not really an outdoorsy type myself. Cartoons and movies, and you can't get a decent cigar in the woods. Still I guess it could be fun... or something..."

The other girl looked up. "You... no. If... you don't like-"

"Nah, like I said! Just us two for the loop. We should do something together, right?"

"You'll complain," Carol pointed out. "Loudly. That is... not fun."

"What? Nah, I can keep it in. I'm totally a reasonable-"

"You're a walking toon."

Peacock opened her mouth, paused, and groaned. "Yeah, yeah. I guess you're right. Noisey gal here. Well... uh... I mean I could invite you to kill some Medici goons with me, but I kinda get the feeling you wouldn't like that."

Carol shook her head.

"So... crud. Um. I mean we could both just do our own things and all but... hey, maybe we could start up a band?"

"What?"

"Like, a singing duo! See how popular we can get-I mean we'd need a mike and a recording studio, and I guess we'd be vinyl only since you're a little stage shy."

Carol tilted her head. "Stage shy."

"Yeah."

"That's what you're going with."

"Yep."

"...It could be fun," Carol mused. "Just... who's going to... write songs?"

"Both of us? Worst comes to worst, we can just steal some Hub music, make a cover, pretend it's our original stuff."

Carol glanced at the ground for a few moments. Then she looked up.

"...No Lady Gaga."

"Yeah, she's not my speed either."

3.7 Masterweaver

"You do look rather handsome without the cybernetics," Marie noted.

Ben Birdland crossed his arms. "I guess wearing a walking iron lung is a bit of a distraction."

"You can't blame me for that," Marie pointed out. "I hadn't even been born back then."

Ben quirked an eyebrow, but decided not to pursue it. "Right. So..." He glanced around. "What's this loop's deal?"

"This is either the hub, or a hub-standard world." Marie started walking down the street. "No magic, no ferals or parasites, cybernetics is just leaving its infancy... there's a video game called 'Skullgirls' where you select one of a colorful cast of characters and set them to fight some others."

"Huh." Ben walked after her. "So, what, this world made us?"

"No. Well, no." Marie shrugged. "As I understand it, the hub is the most stable universe-it wasn't hit by whatever hit Yggdrasil-so the admins stored backups of all the other branches in here. Which inspires the natives to create fiction that happens to correlate to those backups... I actually saw a girl cosplaying as Annie earlier this week."

"That girl from the show Peacock likes?"

"Yes, well. Little girls like to play dress up and pretend." Marie frowned, looking down at her own hands. "Although how a girl knows about *our* game... even a glimpse would be horrible, and Annie's far more deeply buried in the lore than just one of the fighters."

Ben looked down at her for a moment. "...maybe her older sister likes to play or something."

"Maybe. She did seem to be quite a precocious sort. Told me, and I quote, to 'fudge off and let me have my ice cream in peace.'" Marie shook her head with a wry grin, glancing around-and stopped to look through a window.

The man followed her gaze and gave a low whistle. "That's one big rabbit."

"That's a life-size Bugs Bunny plush."

"One of those toons Peacock likes, right?"

"One of the most famous." Marie paused for a moment, before stepping into the store and approaching the register. "Excuse me, sir?"

The man behind the register glanced up as she entered, taking a moment to note the man stepping in after her, before giving her a gentle smile. "What is it, little lady?"

She pointed toward the plush. "How much?"

"Well, that one would be 179.99. Actually, after sales tax that would be, let me run the math here..." He tapped a few keys on the register. "...185 dollars and thirty nine cents, woo."

"Marie-"

"You do take credit, right?" Marie asked, pulling out a plastic card over Ben's voice.

The cashier nodded. "We do, but... are you sure you want to spend that money on this thing?"

"It's for my quadruple amputee girlfriend," Marie explained, her face not shifting even at Ben's low groan.

"...say again?"

"Ben Birdland, sir." Ben tipped his hat to the cashier, putting a hand on Marie's shoulder. "Former detective. Busted a human trafficking ring a while back, volunteered to be Marie and Patricia's case worker." He shook his head. "She deals with it by being matter-of-fact, but... frankly, I don't think you want to know the details."

"...no, I... don't think I do," the cashier muttered. "Um. So... how about I ring up the rabbit plush for you?"

"That would be very kind of you, sir." Marie handed over the card.

A few minutes later, she and Ben were walking down the road again, Marie carrying the plush over her shoulder.

"You're going to wrack up some serious debt with that card of yours, kid."

"Hardly the worst of my crimes. It'll go away once the loop ends anyway." Marie tilted her head. "Thanks for going along with that, by the way."

Ben snorted. "Well, that wild story of yours could have attracted some attention."

"He didn't charge the sales tax, did you notice?" Marie glanced around and, quickly, put the stuffed rabbit in her subspace pocket.

The detective nodded, quietly contemplating the situation for a few moments.

"...so. Took me a couple weeks to find you, even with your blatant net-advertisments. You got a good place to stay?"

"I'm not homeless," Marie assured him. "I've got a small apartment."

"How do you pay rent?"

"Credit."

Ben frowned. "Hey, that's going to catch up with you, even if it goes away by the end of the loop."

"I know, I know. Which is why I intend to take a few billionaires hostage."

Ben crossed his arms. "Really."

"The trick to using the undead is to make it quick and secret," Marie explained. "Too obvious and everyone gets ready for a zombie apocalypse. I've been experimenting with disguising them-"

"Kid, you realize the whole kidnapping thing is sort of a big red flag, even without the corpses."

Marie rolled her eyes. "I'm only going to kidnap the most wealthy and corrupt. Or, failing that, those they have to pretend to care about-and in those cases I am of course deeply respectful of my hostages." She frowned. "I've had to stop my work on one family, though, they just don't care enough about each other to even... well." Her voice softened. "If you absolutely insist... I can choose not to."

For a moment, they walked on in quiet.

"You seem to want my approval an awful lot," Ben mused. "First the thing with Peacock, then this."

"...you're one of the most respectable people that comes to fight me. I can think of but two others that have honor and morality when they enter the crypt, and for both of them they... have personal reasons to detest a skullgirl." Marie wrung her hands. "You do what's right because it's right. Even when it landed you... even when your fellow cops turned on you. You're... I hesitate to say you are absolutely the best in our loop, one of the others is close, but I cannot decide between you two. Nevertheless, you are the best looper from Canopy, and... the most likely to tell me when I've gone too far."

Ben nodded. "You want me to keep you on the straight and narrow."

"Maybe not entirely," Marie admitted. "Maybe I want to stray on occasion, when the Medici need to be thinned or when Patricia has a particularly *unusual* idea. But telling me when I'm straying, that... I appreciate that."

The man considered this for a moment or two.

"...I was goin' to offer to set you up at my place," he finally admitted. "I've got an actual job this loop, being a responsible adult and all. How much debt do you have right now?"

"I'd need to check, but I think... maybe a thousand and a half dollars, not factoring in interest."

"Huh. If I paid that off, would you stop ransoming off billionaires?"

"I haven't actually done it yet. But, yes, that's probably a better option."

"Good." Ben cracked a grin. "Course, that sticks you with the father figure of your girlfriend."

Marie paused. "...I understand that I'm *supposed* to be scared of that," she mused, "but if I'm honest... I don't quite understand why."

3.3 (con't) XeroM52

After many hours, Carol finally woke up. The moment she opened her eyes, she stood up and went directly into 'alert' mode, quickly scanning her surroundings looking for any sort of assailant. When she found none, she relaxed a bit, but she remained vigilant.

It was then she noticed exactly where she was. It was a very big bedroom, decorated with nice and expensive looking furniture, vases and paintings. Not to mention the bed she was resting on, it was really spacious for a person of her size, the woodwork on the headboard was finely carved, the sheets were silky smooth and the pillows felt incredible comfy.

' *Where am I?* ' She couldn't remember the last time she had been on a bed this nice, and that put her on edge. ' *Where's Ben?* ' Though it was foggy, she remembered him from last night, he had

come for her and she had hugged him while cried… then there was nothing.

Suddenly, the sound of the bedroom door opening startled Carol, who jumped out of bed and turned towards the door, prepared for any sort of attack. But instead of an assailant, the person entering the room was the massive Big Band himself.

"B-Ben!" Carol called out happily while she lowered her guard. She was glad to see the cyborg man, but she couldn't help but ask. "Where are we? What is going on?"

"We are on a safe place Carol," Big Band told to the girl that unofficially became his ward. "I found someone that can help us, but more importantly help you."

"H-help me…?" she repeated back in a gloomy tone. Though she didn't like it one bit, Carol was aware of how screwed-up her psyche was. And that she had certain triggers that would induce sudden bursts of uncontrollable rage and pain. She was aware of it all but she couldn't control herself; that was why she was dependant of Ben so much, because he was the only one that cared for her and could prevent her from hurting others.

"Yes, we'll meet him downstairs, but first…" Ben trailed off as he brought up something from beneath his coat. "You may want to clean-up and change first, if you want…" he suggested as he left the set of clean clothes on the bed. "There is a bathroom behind that door." Ben pointed towards a door to the opposite side of the room. "After you are done, you can come down and have some breakfast… that is if you want to," he offered, not wanting to make her feel she was forced to do anything she didn't want to. "I'll be waiting downstairs; you have all the time you want and come whenever you feel comfortable." And with that Big Band turn to leave the room. But before he exited, he turned to look at her once more. "Glad to see you feeling better, Carol."

Carol stood there in complete silence for a few seconds before picking up the clothes Ben brought up to her. ' *How long had it been?* ' she wondered. How long since she had worn something else than the dirty qipao she was currently wearing? How long had it been since she was just a normal girl, with normal girl's worries?

Going to school, doing her homework, studying for exams, walking her dog, having crushes…it all seemed too far away…

' *I bet you'll look cute on these clothes, Carol* .' said a voice in the far recess of her memories. A voice that was incredibly familiar.

' *F-Filia…'* Carol remembered her. Filia had been her best friend before… before Carol was turned into the monster she was today. Nowadays, Filia never recognized her; probably a combination of Carol's radical physical changes and the black parasite that resided on Filia's head. Still, it hurt to see such a close friend of hers confuse her for a monster.

Clutching her head, Carol tried to repress the pain inside her head and went to the bathroom to clean up.

Just like the bedroom, the bathroom looked incredibly nice. Whoever the house belonged to, he must have been rich to afford having such a luxury looking bathroom just for a guest. Looking on the side, Carol found a big mirror and stared at the reflection of a monster.

' *That mask…* ' The mask it was currently wearing… no matter how many times Carol looked at it, the mere sight of it sent shivers down her spine. No wonder people were so afraid. No matter who looked at it, they could only see a monster. The same monster her parents saw that day, when she went looking for them.

' *MOSNTER! GET AWAY!* ' Those were the screams of terror her father shouted when he laid his eyes on the creature at his doorstep. It only wanted to be welcomed, but what it got instead were their screams of fear and hatred.

' *YOU TOOK OUR DAUGHTER AWAY! DIE YOU MONSTER!* ' Those were the shouts of her mother directed at the creature. She too feared and hated the monster that had come to their house claiming to be their lost daughter.

It had been so long since those words were said, but the pain they inflicted still hurt just like the first time. Always cutting away, they never let the wound heal. The pain and sadness those words inflicted, quickly turned into anger and Carol in a small fit or rage she threw a punch, but instead of hitting the mirror, she struck the wall besides of it, breaking several tiles into small pieces. Carol stared at the monster… she too hated it. She too wanted it to disappear and never come back. She wanted nothing more than for the monster to die.

' *You aren't a monster, Carol.* ' She heard the voice of the only man that care for her. ' *Those who did this to you are the real monsters.* ' She wanted to believe these words, but that didn't change the fact that she wasn't going to be normal ever again. The more she looked at the mask, the more pain and anger she felt. It made her blood boil. Carol put her hand over the mask and started to take it off. But the mask wasn't just a simple accessory or protection gear. It was an instrument to de-humanize her further than she already was. So in order for her to never take it off, Brain Drain had it stitched to her face. The more she pulled, the more painful it was. Carol felt every single stitch start ripping. And with one last mighty pull, she tore it off.

What greeted her was a sad face in the mirror with bloody opened stitches. But the most striking thing she could see was her eyes. Or more specifically, the sclera. It was black. Completely black.

Fitting. Beneath the mask the mask of a monster, laid the face of a freak.

Not wanting to continue looking at that face, Carol turned away and prepared to strip down, only to stop at the last second. She had almost forgotten about Buer Drive: the metallic pinwheel attached to her lower spine. If she wanted to bath, she needed to remove it first.

Reaching towards the segmented spine-like cord that connected her actual spine to the blades, she started pulling it out. She hated it when she removed it, because it always felt like she was breaking her spine in two; one could say she was doing exactly that since the cord was connected to her nervous system. As she pulled it out, she couldn't help but let out a silent scream. No matter how many times she did so, it always hurt the same. Once removed, she put the cord with the blades down on floor. After that she finally took her clothes off.

Being in such a nice bath like this one felt surreal for Carol. She couldn't remember the last time she had the chance to wash herself alone. Back on the lab she was just put on decontamination showers while been shackled.

Shaking her head alongside those memories away, Carol turned on the handle to start showering. She could've tried to take a warm long bath since Ben told her that she could take as long as she wanted. But she knew they were waiting for her downstairs, and it was bad manners to keep people waiting. And she disliked bad manners.

The water was very cold at first, but gradually it became lukewarm, just like she preferred. Carol thought she could finally relax a bit but soon found out that washing herself felt awkward. Whenever she reached certain places, she couldn't help but feel the ghost pain of every time she had been touched against her will. The sickening touch of that accursed nurse or Brain Drain as they prepared her for all the surgeries she was subjected to. The cold feel of a scalpel as it cut her flesh opened and exposed her inwards to the world.

Looking down at her own body, she realized how sickly it looked. All filled with the scars and stitches from her surgeries, black nails firmly nailed to her thighs and shoulders, and all the dark veins that were clearly visible for anyone.

Even without the mask, even with Buer Drive, she was still hideous. The idea of ever returning to a normal life was ridiculous now. She

was a living weapon. A monster created to kill an ever bigger monster. The Skullgirl.

It was because of the Skullheart and the Skullgirls it created that she was turned into that she is now. Because the world needed weapons to combat them, she was taken away from home and stripped of her life just so she could kill and destroy something that can never truly be destroyed.

That was all she was now, a monster that kills and destroyed.

' *You don't have to be or do what Brain Drain orders you to do* ,' the voice of Ben told her. *'Just like you, I'm and ASG weapon. The difference is that I don't let that define who I am.'*

"Ben…" Those words meant a lot for Carol, but she couldn't see herself been able to follow them. All of what had previously defined her was already lost; her family, her friends, her school, her life…all just a painful memory of what was stolen for her.

The only thing she had was Ben. But Ben could not always be there for her. Be the one she could rely one, the only one who gave a damn.

Carol stood in silence while the water washed away down the drain. She didn't know how much time had already passed but one thing was for sure, it hadn't passed enough for her.

Sometime later Carol finally came out of the room, carrying Buer Drive on her arms. She was debating if she should connect it once more or not. As she walked down the stairs, Carol observed her surroundings and thought back at her previous assertion about the owner of the house been rich. By now it was confirmed soundly. She hadn't expected house this big, and not only that, but the manor was furnished with all sorts of expensive looking decorations and extravagant paintings. Heck she even saw a pair of suits of armor.

"Glad you decided to come down," commented the familiar voice of her only 'friend/father figure' Big Band. "Those clothes look nice on you," he complimented, although he refrained from making a comment about the lack of mask.

Carol was wearing a simple sleeveless white blouse, black shorts and sandals. She had been grateful for the change of clothes. Although she felt a little bad from tearing a few holes on the shorts because of the nails on her thighs; sadly she couldn't removed them from her body, or her black shackles and choker for that matter.

"T-thanks…" Carol looked away. It had been so long since someone had said something like that to her, so long that she didn't know if took those words as true or if Ben was just saying that to not upset her.

Almost as if he just read her thoughts, Ben added, "And I'm not just saying just because. I really stand by my words."

"…!" Carol looked at him surprised before looking away once more, "T-thanks, Ben…" It really meant a lot for her, despite knowing he would be the only person to ever to those words to her.

"I see you haven't put it back on," Big Band said, looking at Buer Driever on her arms. "You don't have to carry it around like that." Then he took out a cello case from beneath his coat. "Here, you can put it on here for safe keeping."

Carol took the case and quickly adjusted the blades and cord inside of it.

"You must be hungry after last night. Come; follow me so you may have some breakfast," Big Band said as he signaled her to follow him. Carol follow suit carrying the case with her, and after a while she realized he wasn't taking her to some sort of dining hall like all sorts of mansion seemed to have. Instead, Big Band led her to the garden.

"Hope you like eating outdoors," A somewhat familiar voice said to the side. It was a handsome young man sitting on a large and nice-looking table. "And I hope you like the garden too."

Carol remained silent for a few as he observed the man, who was most certainly the owner of the manor. ' *That voice…* ' She could swear she had heard it before, almost as if she had heard it… yesterday.

"YOU!" Carol finally recognized the voice. It was the same one as the black wearing stranger that confronted her on the alley. But before she could do anything a pair cushioned tipped claws grabbed her by the shoulder and stopped her on her tracks. "BEN! HE'S…!"

"The man that is going to help us!" the cyborg said firmly. He cared for the kid and gave her a lot of leeway, but he would also get strict when the situation needed it. This been one of these. "His name is Richard Grayson and he has offered us his help and home for this Loop, and we are thankful for it."

Carol looked at Ben who returned it, with the message: 'Calm down and act nice.' Carol then turned back to the master of the manor. "T-thank you very much, Mr. Grayson," she finally said struggling to not growl. Although she did look at him as if he would suddenly attack them at any second.

"No need to call me so formally, I told you before, you may call me Dick. All my friends do so," Dick tried to relieve the tense air that just formed around them. "Why don't you take a seat, and have some breakfast? You can have whatever you like," he said as he signaled them to take a seat.

Tentatively Carol took a seat wondering what she wanted, while Ben just sat on the floor since a chair wouldn't be able to support his enormous frame. Carol was indecisive, since it had been so long since she had eating something akin to what a normal person would consider food. Suddenly another flashback appeared from the recess of her mind.

Carol was been subjected to some sort of de-sensitivity process, since Brain Drain had been given her small animals with the order of killing them. Carol wanted to refuse but every time she did so, Brain Drain would enter her mind and torture her until she did what he said. This process continued continued for some time until Carol was ordered to kill a bunny by eating it raw. She really wanted to oppose but the mental trauma was too much for her to bear and was forced to end the life of the small creature by biting on its neck.

It disgusted her. That she was forced to do such barbaric things and even worse was the fact that she didn't muster any resistance to that order. It all made her sick.

"AAAAHHHH!" Carol screamed as the memory went away, but the disgusting metallic flavor of blood on her mouth didn't.

"Carol! Are you alright?" Dick asked concerned. He didn't expect his offer would trigger some sort of traumatic memory.

"I…I…" Carol barely utter since she feel like she was about to throw up any second. "I'm not hungry…" She lied. She was very hungry but she didn't know if she could even stomach anything right now.

"Kid…" Ben said looking at this charge. It was obvious to him that she was struggling to repress whatever atrocities Brain Drain did to her mind. It made him rage inside. *'I swear I'll kill the bastard next time I see him! Consequences be damned!'*

"What about a glass of water? Would that be fine?" Dick asked, worried by the mental health of the girl in front of him. Whatever happened to her, it must have been worse than he had imagined.

Carol struggled for a whole minute to calm down the sick feeling in her mouth and stomach. "Y..yes…I'd like…a glass…of water…"

After it was served, Carol drank the fresh water slowly as possible. After she had finished, everyone still remained in silence still feeling a lot of tension on the air. But the silence didn't last much longer.

"Carol, as you may be aware of, I wish to extend and offer to you." Dick dived straight into business since breakfast was no longer an option right now.

"An…offer…?" she repeated back.

"Yes, I want to offer my help and resources to help you," Dick said with a smile. "Not to mention both you and Big Band can stay at the manor all the time you want."

"Why? Why would you do what for us?" she asked sounding distrustful, and for someone who had gone through what she did, can you really blame her?

"Because it is the right thing to do," Dick answered honestly. "Borrowing the words of a friend of mine: 'With great power comes great responsibility'. This means that if I have the power to help anyone in need, it is my responsibility to answer that call."

"Help…" Carol whispered. "WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOU CAN HELP A MONSTER?" she growled.

"I don't know if I can," he answered solemnly. "But it doesn't mean I can't try," he said with such determination that it made Carol recoil a little. "I'll do my best to help you. But the one who has to save you is yourself. "

"But I…can't…" she tried to say, but Dick still continued.

"But you know what? Some people just don't want to be saved," he continued. "Because saving means changing. And changing is always harder than staying the same. It takes courage to face yourself in the mirror and look beyond the reflection," he said sagely, making Carol's eyes widen. "To find the you that you should have been. The you that got derailed by cruel events life handed you. Events that took your life's natural trajectory and twisted it. Changing it into something unimaginable..."

Dick's words, they rang with truth, which made it worse since each one of them made her heart stung. Could it be she was far beyond redemption? Was she too weak to even stand a chance, and save herself? Could it be that her fate was to remain the monster that she was?

But Dick wasn't finished yet. "…or maybe, just maybe, changing you into something incredible," Dick said. "Giving you the courage to embrace your destiny, a destiny you yourself couldn't imagined, and finally realize who you really are… Carol."

The girl just sat there as tears began falling down her cheeks and starting sobbing.

"Tell me Carol… what do you want?"

"Kid…" Ben whispered as he laid his small 'hand' on the girl's shoulder as a sign of reassurance. "Remember you aren't alone, you got me too."

"Ben, I… I… I want to… I want to be saved," she finally managed to say between sobs.

"Good to know," Dick said with a nod. The first step for rehabilitation was to admit one needed help and one's willing to accept it. "Rest for the rest of the day, and tomorrow we will begin."

"Begin…?" Carol asked confused.

"Let us say that the little Robin will start learning how to fly." Dick said with a smile.

3.8 Masterweaver

[Skullgirls][Harry Potter]

Well now. Miss Korbel did warn me about you, and yet I find myself astounded.

Peacock rolled her eyes, partially reveling in the sensation. "Yeah, yeah, put me in hufflepuff already."

I don't think so.

"What? You put Marie there!"

Yes, because she demonstrated the loyalty and tenacity of the house, the hat atop her head explained. *If in a rather... macabre fashion. You, however, are most certainly-*

"Ain't ya supposed to take in the student's wants when you're sorting?"

The only reason you want to be in Hufflepuff is because Marie is there. Relationships can span houses, you know.

"Well... there's also the fact it's in a wine cellar."

Quite. The hat's tone was amused. *And you're a young child in a school where the teachers are, at least presumably, concerned for your well-being.*

Peacock guffawed. "You're kiddin' me, right? I've read the books!"

Yes, yes, there is something of a lack of oversight... still, though. Brows will be raised if you try your usual vices.

"I can knock those brows right back down!"

And that just proves my point. Miss Watson, you are an uncontrollable maniac, and that makes you a staple part of "GRYFFINDOR!"

One of the tables exploded into raucous applause, accompanied by a single brown-haired girl from another. Peacock sighed, took off the

sorting hat with a bow, and gave a flourish as she replaced it with her own. "Thank ya, ladies and gents! I'll be here all night!"

McGonagall "Miss Watson, you should head down to your house table."

"Oh, come on toots, they're expectin' a show! Say, everyone, you want to hear about the time my broomstick got stuck in-?"

"Miss Watson, I'm afraid I'm going to have to insist."

"Don't be such a wet blanket, Micky-G! It's not like I'll be takin' the whole night-"

"Patricia." Marie walked up the stairs, crossing her arms. "Later."

"Come on, Marie-"

"Later."

Peacock looked at her, then let out a long groan. "Fiiiiiine later. Might need to cook up some new material anyway," she grumbled as she tossed the sorting hat back on the stool, "these stooges ain't seen a real show for, what, a quarter century?"

Marie gave McGonagall an apologetic smile. "If she ever gets to be too much of a handful, let me know, okay?"

"Miss Korbel, I am perfectly capable of handling-"

"No. Trust me, you're not. Patricia's... unique." Marie sighed. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't undermine you in public. I'll go back to my seat now." With a small curtsey she returned to her table.

The old witch glanced at her, then back at her list. "...Weasley, Ronald!"

3.9 Masterweaver

"So you got to her first, huh."

"Yes. The blood... pulls me."

Big Band nodded. "How did it feel?"

"...it didn't. The first time-it was anger." Carol looked up, blood dripping from the scars on her face. "Now it's nothing. I killed a little girl... and it was nothing."

"I hate to say it, but... that version's not a little girl. Not anymore."

"...she seems nice," Carol muttered. "When she's... looping."

"She's said to put her down if she's not Awake."

"Needed doesn't... doesn't make this right."

Big Band sat down next to her. "No. It doesn't."

Carol looked down at the mask in her hands.

"...Ben..."

Big Band looked at her. "Yeah, kid?"

"...do you think... do you think, I'll ever not be... broken?"

The man gave out a slow, heavily glissandoing sigh. "I think you can heal. I don't think you can go back to what you were, you've been put through too much shit for that, but I think you can heal."

"...why am I looping, Ben?" Carol stared at her mask. "I don't understand."

"...I'm not entirely sure on that," Big Band admitted. "Our world in particular, seems to have a lot wrong with it-not just talking about the

people, I mean on a fundamental space-and-time level. So it could just be random."

"Oh."

"But," he continued, "I've had a few fused loops by this point. Talked to some others. Apparently, while it's not a hundred percent, there is a sort of pattern. People who loopers care about, like as friends or as family... they're more likely to start looping themselves." He shrugged. "So it's my fault you're in this mess."

Carol blinked, looking up to him. "...you... care about me?"

"Course I do, kid. Took you in the moment I saw you." Big Band looked at her. "Couldn't let you suffer more than you already had."

"...thanks." She looked away. "I... thanks."

"...It's my honor, kid."

They sat in the rain for a moment or two longer.

"He wants me back. I destroyed the heart and he wants me back to 'talk.'" Carol shivered. "He's telling me to come back now."

Big Band stood. "Well, I'll come with you."

"You don't need-"

"Guy like that needs to learn to face the music."

Carol shook her head. "Don't like puns."

"You're smiling."

"I am and I hate it."

"Sorry, I'll tune it down a notch."

A hacking noise came from Carol's throat, even as she started to slump down the road. "Everyone uses the puns. The toon, the wrestler... the nurse... even the skullgirl. Cat's the worst, though."

"World like ours, you find humor where you can."

"...yeah. True." Carol dropped her mask. "Maybe I... could laugh more often."

3.3 (con't) XeroM52

It had already been a several months since Carol's 'rehabilitation' began. It consisted mostly of Dick teaching Carol discipline and self-control through martial arts and meditation; in the same way he had helped Jason Todd focused his anger, Dick worked Carol through her issues.

The first few days were rough since Dick prohibited Carol from using Buer Drive and Gae Bolga during training. He had seen her fight with them, and frankly he was put-off by her 'style' of fighting, if one could even call it that. She fought more like an animal more than a human with the way she crawled and pounced. Not to mention the ways in she used Gae Bolga were disturbing to say the least. Snapping her leg so that the exposed bone forced Gae Bolga to bleed out and extend the range of her attack was an example of that.

Carol fought by breaking and mutilating her own body in order to mutilate the opponent's. Dick would've written the whole thing off if it weren't so effective and difficult to both predict and counter. Heck, even Batman would have trouble against some of those moves. But despite their weird effectiveness, Dick prohibited Carol from utilizing them too. Instead, Dick began teaching her the basics. It was really challenging since Carol was very different from his other 'students'. Carol had the stamina, the strength, the speed, the endurance, and the instincts, of any of her students when they were already out on the field. But she lacked technique. Dick had to make Carol unlearn

everything before she could learn anything. It had taken months, but Carol finally was showing some progress in her technique.

But the physical side of her discipline reconditioning wasn't all. Dick also wanted to work on her mental discipline and fortitude. This had presented itself to be far more challenging than the physical side of things.

First of all Carol was prone to mood swings and fits of rage when certain words or things were said or done to her. Dick, with the immense help of Big Band, managed to help her overcome some of these issues. For example, one of their breakthroughs was to help Carol with her eating disorder. Apparently when she was on Lab 0, Carol was fed intravenously, meaning she was fed through a tube that pumped a nutritional fluid in order to bypassing the usual process of eating and digestion. It had been difficult, but with lots of patience and care, Carol was finally able to consume solids-on a small quantity, but progress was progress.

Progress was slow and Dick considered that it would be for the best to bring in someone that could help them. Thank goodness, she was Awake this Loop. Rachel Roth, also known as Raven, was the best person they could ask for helping them with Carol. Her empathic abilities were invaluable but more importantly, if someone could relate and connect with Carol, it was Raven.

Carol and Raven's first meeting didn't start off with the right foot. Despite Raven being younger than Carol (since this was years before the Teen Titans were ever a thing), the older girl felt extremely intimidated by the 'dark' visage of Raven. Not to mention the fit Carol had when she discovered Raven's ability to peer into others' self.

" **GET. OUT. OF MY HEAD!** "

Among the many sins Brain Drain committed, the most prominent was the mental torture and manipulation he had subjected Carol. Not only he had brainwashed Carol in order to make her into his own personal puppet, he also implanted several 'triggers' inside of her

that prompted a lot of her fits of rage. According to Big Band, Carol had managed to override some of this triggers and mental commands, pushing Brain Drain away from her mind and regaining some control. But this experience proved too traumatic to her, and the idea of someone entering her mind made her loss control and she attacked ANYTHING and ANYONE around her.

As one could've imagined, finding out Raven was an empath didn't garner pretty results. It took several attempts before Carol could even be on the same room as Raven without flipping out, and even more for them to be able to talk with each other. But once that bridge was finally crossed, everything began to come along nicely. Carol had finally let Raven into her mind, and the empath did everything to find out what kind of 'nasty' triggers Brain Drain had left hidden and 'disable' them. She explained her findings inside of Carol's psyche.

"Override code: 36E-25-40," Raven said ominously. "I don't know what it means but this sequence causes a total mental shutdown and Carol is left as nothing but a lifeless doll."

"36E-25-40…?" Big Band repeated, pondering the meaning, since they seemed extremely familiar to him. In fact it almost sounded like… "Valentine…"

"Valentine…?" Dick turned to look at Big Band. "That's the nurse that kidnapped Carol and helped Brain Drain in his experiments, correct?"

"Yes…" BB nodded in confirmation. "And the sequence stands for her body measurements. Bust: 36E, waist: 25, Hip: 40," the detective explained. "I would laugh if it weren't so sickening."

"Is that's so…" Dick refrained from asking how the cyborg knew those measurements, or comment on how those numbers didn't sound bad at all. "So Raven… can you get rid of this override code?"

"I can but… it would take time," Raven said. "But I'm worried more about her lack of interaction with the outside word. The only people

she see's are all of us and Alfred. If she grew too dependent of us, she would never be able to face the world at large or from the ones of other Loops."

"True, but Carol isn't ready to interact with the world. She isn't emotionally stable to endure society's nature," Big Band pointed out.

"I agree, but Raven's concern is also true," Dick said as he pondered what to do. "Is there a way we could help her without forcing her to take such a big step?"

"If I may… I have an idea we could try." Raven offered with a small smile.

Carol was sitting on the grass outside and in the beautiful gardens that surrounded the Manor. She usually came here just to relax and observe the flowers. They reminded her of her life before Lab 0, when she spent time every day after school to tend the flowers behind her home.

Home. It still hurt to think back to those times since every time she did so; she also remembered the screams of fear her parents directed at her. Now every happy memory of her family was soiled forever. But despite the pain, she continued to come and observe the garden, because she could still find some semblance fondness from her previous life within them.

Carol remained sitting there in complete silence until the sounds of steps snapped her out of her trance-like stare. Turning her head around, Carol saw Raven walking towards her with a box on her hands.

"May I sit with you for a minute?" Raven asked for permission which Carol instantly granted.

"What's in the box?" the brunette couldn't help but ask curiously.

"I brought something that I know it will help you," the empath answered honestly. "But before I give it to you, I must warn you that it will require hard work and responsibility from your part. Do you think you are ready?"

"What is it?" She was uneasy at the idea of it been something she might not be ready for, but after all these months she wasn't going to give up just yet. She wanted to recover, not only for all the hard work everyone had put on her, but also for herself. "I… I'm willing to try."

"That's what I wanted to hear." Raven said as she handed the box to Carol. "Here, open it."

Carol, nervously tried to open the box, only for it to suddenly open for itself and the contents jumped at her. "Gah!" she cried surprised for just a second before she noticed what was it that jumped out. It was… "A puppy…?"

"You told me you liked them and well… I had a talk with both Dick and Ben and they agree to it, as long as you accepted the responsibility that is taking care of a pet," Raven said. She saw Carol enthralled by the small canine looking at her with big adorable eyes. "It's a she, by the way."

Carol kept staring at the small dog, which looked at her without fear or prejudice, with eyes full of innocence and curiosity, but more importantly seeking the warm embrace of love. Carol was so moved that she started crying, but her tears weren't from sadness but happiness.

"I… love… her…" she managed to say between sobs.

"And I know she loves you too," Raven assured with a smile, happy for Carol.

Taking care of another living being was a big responsibility, not to mention it would test Carol on what she had learned and accomplish this last couple of months, but Raven wasn't worried because she

knew Carol was ready; ready to open her heart once more and find happiness by loving and receiving love from an unconditional source.

"What are you gonna call her?" Raven asked.

Carol, now calmer after the sudden surge of emotion, stopped for a second and look at the puppy contemplating which name to give her. Somehow, this cutie reminded her of her old friend Fillia with those expressive eyes of hers. But calling her after her felt a little odd, so she decided on a similar sounding name.

"I think I'll call this little girl… Fukua."

Compiler's Commentary:

3.1: Big Band handled his introduction to the loops fairly well.

3.2: Painwheel... did not. But she can't really be blamed for that.

3.3: Recovery, from anything, is long and arduous. With friends, family, and gentle care though, it can eventually come to pass.

3.4: The Loony needs a Tune-up.

3.5: Scary scared little girls.

3.6: P&P records managed to accidentally kickstart the rock genre in Canopy.

3.7: While Ben Birdland tried (and failed) to intimidate Marie, Annie moved to Japan and broke the Yakuza.

3.8: Things at Hogwarts were certainly interesting that loop...

3.9: Always remember: You are never alone. And stupid jokes are the best.

And if you, dear reader, should wish to contribute your own snip, you are welcome to join us on the Indie Games Infinite Loops thread over on Spacebattles.

Everybody Warmed Up?

In the infinitely repeating eternities, there's going to be a fair bit of downtime. Even for those that come from a rather poor reality will sometimes just sit back and relax.

4.1 Masterweaver

"Scho, what I was thinkin' was that he. He was a fookin' weird bastard, right? Like a fooked up lil'... uh... doggy, guy." Peacock swung her arm wide, obliviously knocking out one of her audience, much to the amusement of the rest. "Cause, you know. Ferals, they can't help it, but this guy. This guy was actually *wearin* ' his doggy traits. He could take off his ears and his tail! THEY WEREN'T EVEN REAL!"

In the corner booth of the bar, Marie sighed slowly.

"So I goes up to him and sayz. Sayz you'zacutepuppy and he actually does the whole woof woof thing! He gets down and does the woof woof thing! Shakes his butt!" Peacock waggled her own rear in demonstration, earning a few cheers from the crowd. "Ohmahgawd you would not! NOT! Believe what happened next."

Encouraging questions came from the men around the table. Marie, for her part, simply took her shotglass and slowly drained it.

"See. See what happens next. I grab a fake bone. 'Do you like the bone?' I sayz. 'Go fetch!' I sayz, and I throwz it andhegoesrunninafterandbringsitback. IN HIS MOOOOOOOUTH." Peacock cackled, stamping a foot on the table. "I mean, who does that? Crazy fookin' bastards ya meet in... uh... Marie, where was this?"

"Comic-con," Marie replied blandly. She took her fifth shotglass in her hands, wishing she could get even a little buzz.

"Right right, comicarcon." Peacock turned back to the crowd. "Like, the great mixing pot of nerds. 'Did you know in issue five hundridfiftysumthin lady Kickface had bluuuuuuuuuue socks?' Uh, no, no I did not, and why the fook do ya think I care?!" She sighed. "Great merch though. I guess if you have nuttin' batter ta do then obsess over some... bullshit fake stuff, you learn how to make real fake stuff that ain't bullshit!"

Marie rubbed her forehead.

"Like, see this?" Peacock pulled out an impressive looking weapon. "Totally fake! It's got little spinny lights and all but it ain't... ain't like a real gun. Some guy saw a show where, yah know, big monsters were stompin' or something and, and so people make these big robots with big guns and this looks like that, but if I point it at youz-" She swung it around, slurred rat-a-tats escaping her mouth as the laughing crowd jokingly dodged. "It's fun to look at, but this gun is totally totally facke!"

"And three," Marie muttered, "two, one..."

Peacock pulled out another large metal object. "This baby, though, she's completely real."

Her steely teeth grinned at the suddenly dead silent crowd.

"Ya know, I'da liked to have this baby when the Medicis found me," she commented conversationally. "Maybe then I'd still have my eyes. Easier ta tell who's guilty when I canzee their faces, you know?" The machine gun in her hand tipped, and a bit of the crowd flinched away. "Course, this being a Medici hangout and all, I'm kinda guessin' you all know that."

"Patricia."

Peacock flicked an arm petal to look over to Marie. "Eh?"

She simply pointed to the wide-eyed hookers standing next to the jukebox.

"Oh. OH! Yeah, hey gals!" Peacock waved. "Anybody else?"

Marie looked over the crowd. "...no, I don't think so. Maybe the bartender."

"Gotcha." Peacock turned back to the crowd of terrified faces. "Yeah, sorry guys, guess I'm gonna have to not show this girl off."

She put the gun away, getting some sighs of relief.

"Too much collateral." She hefted a spiked bat. "This way's more fun anyway!"

Some of the smarter thugs rushed for the door, trying to push past the masked men in pinstripe suits. One of them swung a fist at a face-and backed off with a cry of horror when he saw the bare skull behind the crumbling facade.

Marie simply sat back, sipping from another shotglass as she watched the cackling girl slaughter the crowd of thugs. She might not have liked bars that much, but seeing her girlfriend having fun was worth it.

4.2 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Familiar of Zero]

After so many Loops, Louise already knew how to perform magic and not cause an explosion that blew up on her face. Still, she had to keep up appearances and screw up her spells since being able to perform flawless magic overnight would rise a lot of alarms in

people's heads. Once again she was performing her summoning ritual, wondering what would come up next. Would it be Saito? Or would it be some crazy Looper from across the universe? As the cloud of dust formed by the explosion of her spell casting cleared off, she got her answer in the form of a gigantic man wearing a trench coat straight out of a detective story.

"Huh? This is certainly weird," said the mountain of a man in a very suave voice in English.

"Sir, are you Awake?" Louise asked in perfect English, making the rest of the class look at her weirdly. "Don't worry about the rest of them, they can't understand what we are saying."

The giant man nodded. "Are you the local Anchor?"

"Yes," Louise confirmed. "Sorry for hurrying you along, but we need to complete the Summoning ceremony or people would start talking…" she said apologetically.

"Your Loop, your rules. You are the expert here," the man said. "So how does this summoning ceremony is completed?"

"We need to kiss," Louise answered bluntly.

"Sorry, kid. But I'm probably three times your age," he refused.

"Age is kind of an illusion, once you are in the Loops," she pointed out. "Besides, this is a necessary step if we wish to carry on with the Loop."

"Are you sure about this?" he questioned, a little uncomfortable.

"Like you said, I'm the expert. Also this isn't the first time I had to kiss an old man or a weirdo." One could only imagine what kind of people the loops threw her way.

"Just get this over with…"

"My name is Louise Françoise le Blanc de la Vallière." Louise said in her mother tongue. "Pentagon of the Five Elemental Powers; grant your blessings upon this being, and make it my familiar." With a small hand way, she indicated him to bend down to her level and planted a kiss to mark him as her familiar.

"My name is Louise by the way," she introduced herself, knowing that he now could understand her. "What should I call you?"

"Call me... Big Band."

Louise couldn't help but sigh at the scene playing in front of her. It seemed that Guiche was destined to 'duel' with every familiar she had ever summoned. All because everyone somehow managed to expose him as the two-timing bastard he was at the beginning of the loop.

"Let us begin our duel, commoner!" Guiche taunted, not feeling intimidated by Big Band's 7'8" (2.37 meters) frame.

"Kid, you don't want what you are asking for." Big Band looked at the slender boy who didn't look like he could stand a good punch to the face. "Just turn away and apologize for your behavior!"

"As if! I'll teach you to show respect to your betters!" Guiche waved his rose, from which petals fell to the ground, summoning his bronze valkyrie golems. "Go my valkyrie, show this commoner his place!" Guiche wasn't worried about his opponent's size since he had magic on his side.

Big Band looked at the incoming golem with its sword ready to attack. Frankly he wasn't all that impressed. In fact he remained still as the attack came.

"Now!"

Then at the last second before the sword even hit, BB summoned a cymbal that parried the attack completely by transforming the force behind the attack into wave vibrations.

"What?!" Guiche shouted, surprised that his golem attack had no effect whatsoever.

"I'm not done!" From beneath his coat, BB released a gigantic punch the size of a small car and obliterated the golem to pieces. Quicker than his size would imply, BB rushed towards Guiche gave him a hard look in the eye. "Now listen here…"

"What…?" Guiche asked, doing his best not to soil his pants.

"To this!" Big Band summoned two metallic arms and trapped Guiche inside a giant bell, which he started ringing. After he was done, the blond noble was on the floor in a very dazed state. "Hear that ringin'? Recess is over! Now clean up your act!" BB said, before he marched away. The rest of the students who witnessed the duel were left completely dumbfounded.

"Was it really necessary to be that rough?" Louise asked to her giant familiar.

"Rough? I thought I was been soft as smooth jazz."

Louise couldn't help but groan. "You and your music puns!"

It was the day of the exhibition of familiars, and Louise looked more confident than ever. Sure, Big Band would have to compete against more majestic familiars like Tabitha's dragon, but what BB lacked in looks, he made up in sheer musical talent. Who could beat a man that was literally a One-Man-Band? Besides, his Jazzy tunes were something out of this world. Literally, since Jazz wasn't a music genre that existed on her world.

"You were great, BB!" Louise cheered for her familiar as the both of them walked away from the exhibition grounds. "The judges, especially the princess, loved your music!"

"It is nice to just kick back and play up a tune every now and them," Big Band said, slightly elated. He may not have shown it, but he was a little nervous of performing his jazz to a public that never heard of it before. "That trophy would look good in your room."

"What are you talking about? You were the one on stage, the trophy is all yours!"

"Thanks, kid."

Suddenly the ground started trembling. When a shadow fell upon the both of them, Big Band and Louise looked up to see a massive rock golem.

"Looks like you are out of luck!" the golem's creator, Fouqet of the Crumbling Earth, said as she rode on top of the massive head of her golem.

Ignoring her for a second, Big Band turned to look down at his pink haired 'master'. "Did you forget to tell me anything?"

"Oops. Kinda slip out of my mind." After so many Loops, Fouqet wasn't even a challenge anymore, so she would frequently forgot to stop her before her attack at the school.

"Sloppy notes are what ruin good melodies, kid."

"I told you to stop it with the music puns and allegories!" Frankly, they were getting really old by now.

Big Band just turned his head away and pretended he didn't hear her. "You! Whoever you are!" BB said to Foquet. "Dead or alive you are coming with me!"

"Ha! What do you hope to achieve against a golem of this size!" Foquet mocked.

"This!"

Big Band unleashed a flurry of punches so fast that he left after images.

"TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!TUBA!
TUBA!

It didn't need to be said, but the giant golem ended up as a pile of dust on the floor.

"What? What are you?!" Foquet screamed, frightened by the power of this strange summon.

"The name's Big Band! And I just showed you the full extent of the Jam!"

4.3 XeroM52

Peacock Awoke in a very peculiar manner. First of all, she was apparently in the middle of taking a stroll in the middle of some dense woods at midnight with the full moon over her. Second, she was palette-swapped, meaning she wasn't in her normal coloration. She was dressed primarily in red and black, her face was a lot paler than usual, and her empty eye sockets were red.

"Meh… stranger things had happened before." Peacock shrugged, not caring at all.

But then the tranquility of her midnight stroll was shattered by screams of horror in the distance.

"Hm… should I just continue my walk and pretend nothing happened or go investigate what those screams are all about?" she pondered, weighing the pros and cons of each option. "If I go, I might end up in a scary movie scenario and get chased by a slasher killer or a monster; that is bad... but on the other hand, I might get to kill said killer or monster! Count me in!" And with that she made her way towards the screams of horror had come from.

What Peacock found was a lot of what her in-loop memories were calling ghouls, and a vampire dressed as a priest molesting a police woman. "Hey, what's the matter Father, Little Timmy isn't returning your calls anymore?" she joked with a cheeky smirk plastered on her face.

"Did…did you just made a child molestation joke?" the priest asked, somewhat annoyed. He might be an undead monster hellbent on creating an army of ghouls but he had some limits; children, or at least the boys, were food, not toys to molest.

"Well, I thought it was appropriate given the situation we are in," the teen psychopath said. "I mean, you can't just let a good set up like this pass you by! Not to mention catholic priest molesting kids is a classic joke, it guarantees a few laughs."

"Are you going about? Are you trying to be funny?" The vampire looked at the child in red and black as if she was just a nutcase. "Well, here's a joke for you!" Then he snapped his fingers and gave an order to his horde of ghouls. "Kill her!"

Since his words were their commands, some of the ghouls within the horde of started shooting at the kid. A shame that all the bullets seemed to miss, despite the girl never moving one inch from where she was standing.

"What? How could they miss?"

"I wouldn't say that they missed, just look at what they did to my cheese" Peacock said as she took out a large piece of yellow cheese. "It's full of holes!" She then turned the cheese away. "Oh by the way, your ghouls are all dead!"

"What?! What the fuck are you even saying?" He turned behind him and saw his entire horde on the floor completely dead. "How?"

"Nah, nah nah! Never ask to explain the punchline, or it isn't funny anymore!" the girl said as she waved her finger at him in disapproval. "Now, why don't you let that police woman go and I might just kill you in a quick and painless manner, huh?"

"Hey, don't come closer or the girls gets it!" the vampire priest threatened while hiding behind the police woman. "She's the only one alive. You wouldn't want her to die, would you?" When the girl remained silent, he took that as confirmation. "If you let me go, I'll release the girl."

Peacock stood there for a couple of seconds in complete silence. "Police Woman? Are you Awake?"

"What kind of stupid question is that?" the priest said.

"I said police woman! Are you Awake?" Peacock asked once more, looking at 'Chesty Mcguee' in the eye. "Are you feeling Loopy?"

"I don't get… what you're trying to say," she finally said.

"What…what is going on here?" the priest asked, completely confused.

"Tell me Father? Do you like the sea?" Peacock asked out of the blue.

"What? What does that have to do with anything?" The priest was really losing it with all of these non-sequiturs.

"Because I love the sea," Peacock said, ignoring the vampire. "You could say a Pirate's life for me!"

As soon as she said this she took out a cannon out of nowhere and lighted the fuse with a cigar that also appeared out of nowhere into her mouth. "Yo-ho-hoe!" And with that the cannon fired.

The police woman stood paralyzed in fear, but before the cannonball could kill her she felt herself falling as if the ground just suddenly disappeared. She fell out of the way just in the nick of time; the cannonball passed over her head and struck the vampire face, making it explode into tiny chunks of meat.

"Now that's a wrap!" Peacock celebrated by taking a puff from her cigar. "Nothing better than a smoke after some killing." She turned to 'Chesty La Rue', who had fallen just behind her. "Want a smoke?"

"Eh… no thanks I don't smoke," the blond woman refused out of instinct... before having her mental shakedown. "What was that? What is going on?"

"Look here, Hootie McBoobs," Peacock said without shame, "You may want to cash in some of your money out of the bank and maybe start anew in… I don't know… Abu-Dhabi, and forget everything you saw tonight, comprende?"

"I guess…" the officer said, still shaken by the whole thing. "My name's Seras, Seras Victoria."

"Lady, I don't give a hoot if your name is Sarah Bust-Annie!" Peacock said, taking another smoke. "Just move along would you? And never mention this to anyone, or I might have to kill ya!"

"Ok! I promise!" Seras said, nervously saluting.

"Good. Now let's get out of here."

On a camp a few miles away inside a private tent, Sir Integra Fairbrook Wingates Hellsing was pondering about the scene she just watched, and the abilities of the Looper that had replaced Alucard this time. As she placed a cigar on her lips, a small pair of hands offered a lighter and lighted it up for her.

"Master Hellsing…" a small maid replacing Walter, referred to her in a very polite tone. "If you don't mind me asking… what is your opinion on Patricia's performance tonight?" Despite the two of them knowing each other were Awake, the Little Maid, Marie, still acted and served her as a loyal servant would do.

"It was… interesting to say the least." What surprised her most was that she didn't notice how the ghouls had been disposed off, at first. And the ability to move objects through those holes of hers could have some useful applications. "Although I'm not really convinced about that attitude of hers." It reminded her of a lot of psychopaths who had replaced Alucard within the Loops.

"If you don't mind me speaking my mind, Master Hellsing…" Marie waited for a nod of confirmation from her current master before continuing. "Patricia, despite her unruly behavior, is a powerful asset to have around."

"Are you worried I that I would kick her off the organization?" Integra looked at the maid directly in the eye. "I think you are underestimating me…" she said, feigning annoyance.

"I meant not such offense, Master Hellsing," Marie apologized and bowed.

"I have to deal with Alucard on daily basis…" Not to mention some of his more erratic variants too. "Peacock will not present a challenge." Besides without Seras around, it would fall into Patricia to stop Millennium with her power. Speaking of powers, "Marie…?"

"Yes, Master Hellsing?"

"We have talked about Peacock's and her abilities…but we haven't discussed yours." Integra had some in loop memories of what the maid was capable off. Heck according to them, she had been serving the Hellsing bloodline longer than Walter ever did, and she still looked like a 13 year old. But in order to be prepared she ought to know what the Maid was truly capable of.

"Master Hellsing… I'll tell you what I told your father. 'I'll only use my full power when nuclear weapons prove to be unviable against the enemy', that is all."

"Hn." Sir Integra nodded. "I'll keep that in mind."

"As for Patricia, also keep in mind that just like you haven't seen the extent of her powers, you also haven't seen the extent of her unruly behavior, Master Hellsing," Marie warned Integra.

"I'll keep that in mind also." Integra said unworried. ' *She can't be worse than Alucard when he calls himself the Crimson Fucker, can she?* '

Far away from everyone else, a small figure looked around and saw what this Loop was about.

"Nope. Fudge this place," Annie said, before teleporting out of the planet and into the stars above.

4.4 Masterweaver

"Girl's night out! WOOOOOOOO!" Peacock tossed her hat into the air, clicking her heels together in glee before pegging it back on her head.

"Oy!" Avery popped out of the top. "Don't just do that, boss, I was busy reorganizin' my sock drawer!"

"You don't wear socks," Peacock pointed out.

"Yes, that's the issue here," Carol muttered to herself. "The bird doesn't wear socks, that's clearly the problem."

Marie glanced at her, before clearing her throat. "Patricia, this is a *girl's* night out. It might be inappropriate for Avery to be in attendance."

The cartoonish bird blinked, sharing a look with the eyeless girl.

"She's got a point," Peacock mused.

"I'm the one with access to the gang," Avery countered. "Without me, you-"

"-will be with me and Carol here," Marie interjected smoothly. "And you know we'll keep her safe."

"Bein' *safe* ain't the issue! It's bein' w-!"

Peacock slammed the top of her hat shut, cutting off the blue bird. "So, howzabout we just get goin' then?" she asked, her smile nervous.

Carol sighed. "Peacock... Patricia-"

"Sorry, toots, only Marie gets to call me that."

"Look, I... I just had to kill Brain Drain again last night. And you know that's... still a bit of an issue for me. I get that you're the walking toon and all, but can we at least try to have a relaxing night without all your antics? Please?"

Peacock flicked an arm petal at her. "See, here's tha thing. I get you're all traumatized and shit, and I want to be sensitive, but I also wanna be me and me is the girl with the great sense of humor and amazing timin'. So-"

"How about a compromise?" Marie stepped between them. "Avery can go into your subspace pocket, for the moment, and should either I or Carol decide it's appropriate you can bring him back out. Other then that, we won't ask you to restrain yourself."

"...Huh." Peacock rapped her hat. "Whaddya think, Avery, good deal?"

"I guess I could hang out in there," the bird mused. "Me and the fellows could have a movie night."

"So long as you keep the bombs from blowin', I'm cool with it."

"Give me a minute to get the guys."

Carol watched as a number of animate inanimate objects appeared out of... well, a number of holes in Peacock's body, before promptly vanishing again.

"You just took your imaginary friends out of your baseline hammerspace and put them into your looping hammerspace," she managed.

"Yep." Peacock adjusted her hat. "Kinda silly jugglin' act, but I figger it's worth it to have a fun night, you know?"

"...Right." Carol swallowed. "Thank you for, uh, your consideration."

"Not a prob, toots. Now come on, let's go-er-where are we headed?"

"The ice cream parlor seems like a good place for us," Marie offered.

"I could... go for some ice cream," Carol agreed.

"We've got a loop favorite!" Peacock declared, starting off. "Three oudda foh Canopy loopers like ice cream!"

Marie quirked a brow as she followed. "Big Band doesn't?"

"Gunks up his pipes, 'parently."

"Ah." The white-haired girl nodded. "That makes sense. I..."

She paused, looking back towards Carol, who was trailing an awkward distance behind.

"Patricia... would you mind terribly going ahead and making sure there aren't any disreputable gentlemen?"

"I guess it'd be the chivalrous thing ta do," the ginger mused. "Don't keep me waitin' too long, Marie!" With a tip of her hat, she took a running position and activated her rocket boots.

The skullgirl fell back to the schoolgirl. "If you don't want to do this-"

"No, I do, it's just..." Carol gestured. "She's a little... overwhelming."

"I suppose she does take some getting used to, but.. she's genuine, at the least." Marie smiled faintly. "And she'll do anything for what she believes in."

"...Brain Drain said he'd do anything for the perfect anti-skullgirl weapon."

"Brain Drain," Marie said firmly, "is an amoral sociopath who refuses to moderate any of his actions. Patricia is not a sociopath, and her morals are just a touch... broader than most. She'll never lie about her reasoning, she'll always tell you why she's fighting you... I'm not saying she's without fault. But she will not hurt you, Carol."

"I know that, that's not... not what I meant." Carol sighed. "I'm sorry, I'm just being a downer."

Marie rubbed her forehead. "You just have a few trust issues, Carol. That's understandable. The whole point of this is... just... hanging out. Being friends. Like the ordinary girls we... we should have been."

The two of them were quiet.

"...I like, um... I like strawberry ice cream myself." Carol rubbed an arm. "Maybe we should get going before Peacock eats it all."

Marie nodded. "Of course. After you?"

Carol bit her lip.

"...Or I could go first, if you still want to keep me in your sight."

"Yeah, that would... help. Sorry-"

"It's fine, Carol." Marie started down the road. "It's fine."

4.5 XeroM52

Carol was walking down the streets towards home after classes for the day were over. Carol enjoyed the Loops where she awoke before her kidnapping, when she could pretend to be a normal high-schooler without a care in the world; one of the reasons why she was never bored of school.

"Hey, wait!" a voice called for her from behind. The other reason was that every Loop something new would happen with her classmates, this being one occasion.

"Oh, Upperclassman Dandy!" Carol turned and recognized her fellow student who was sporting his trademark pompadour and white jacket. "What can I do for you?" she asked politely.

"Hey, you are Carol, right from class 1-B?" he asked, and Carol answered with a nod. "Say, I been wondering…would you like to go out sometime?" he asked her very bluntly.

Had it been her normal self, she would be a nervous wreck by now. Not only was he older, he was one of the best looking guys at her

school not to mention one of the most athletics as well, and that made him one of the most sought after guy by almost all the girls. Heck, she too once crushed on him.

But that was the past, this was the now. "Sorry, but I'm not interested. But thank you anyways," Carol declined as gently and politely as she could.

She currently wasn't really looking for a relationship, much less with a non-looper, but what sealed the deal was that she knew Dandy wasn't really interested in her at all. Carol knew about guys like him, looking to take advantage of girls like she pretended to be. Wallflowers and insecure girls who would do anything for some attention; that's what he wanted, someone he could control and have tied around his finger. And Carol wasn't going to stand for any of that.

"Now, if you excuse me, I got to get back home," she said as she began to walk away.

That was something that Dandy wasn't going to accept. "Hey, wait just a second." He stopped her by forcefully grabbing her by the arm.

"Please let go of me," Carol said seriously without any sign of fear.

"Hey, just hear me out." he said without releasing his grip on her arm. "Just one date. I'll treat you right, babe."

"I said let go of me!" Carol repeated, ready to defend herself if he refused again.

"Hey, no one says no to me!" he shouted, getting angrier tightening his grip on her arms with enough force to hurt a normal girl.

That was beyond the limit Carol was willing to tolerate. But as she was about to punch Dandy on the face, another voice cut in.

"Let her go you creep!"

"Huh? Who said that?" Dandy looked around for the owner of the smooth-sounding voice, only to receive a powerful blow to the face sending him flying into the air and unceremoniously unto the ground completely knocked out.

"I did," the voice replied as the owner fell upon Carol's shoulder. "Hey kid, are you alright?" he asked, somewhat worried.

"Ben?! Is that you?" Carol exclaimed in surprise as she looked at a miniature version of Big Band on her shoulder. "Why are you so tiny?" She moved her hand towards her shoulder in an attempt to poke him to see if he was real.

"Because of a freak lab accident," Big Band responded. "You remember Stanley Whitefin? The Dagonian scientist who is a shark?" He waited for Carol's nod before he continued. "Well, he was working in some sort of shrinking ray which so happened to be malfunctioning. Anyway it misfired and hit me, causing me to shrink."

"Couldn't he revert the polarity of the ray or something?" Carol asked, remembering the lingo scientist used in those sci-fi shows.

"I asked him the same thing, but he said and I quote: 'why would I have a shrink ray that can make things grow large too? It defeats the purpose of a shrink ray' end of quote." Ben sighed, annoyed. "Now I'm stuck like this until Stanley makes a grow ray."

"Why don't you use your transformation spell?" Carol asked, referring to the magic spell he learned from Louise from that one loop. "Couldn't that make you bigger?"

"I did." Ben sighed again. "You are looking at the result of me growing ten times my size," the 8 cm (3″) tall man said. "Still you haven't answered my question. Are you okay? That punk didn't hurt you?"

"Yes, I am fine," Carol answered, with a small smile on her face. She was glad that Ben still looked after her despite the fact he could be

doing anything else right now... like worrying about his current height issue. It made her happy that he remained true to his words that he would be there for her no matter what. "So, should I bring you back to the Lab?"

"There's no hurry, Stanley said it would take some time to whip out the grow ray, so there's no need for me to head back yet," Ben said solemnly. "Besides I retained most of my strength so I can still bust some skulls." That punk Dandy could attest to that if he weren't unconscious at the moment.

"Maybe you can accompany home!" Carol suggested. "I can pass you off as a novelty keychain or something." And when she saw the look on Ben face that showed he was about to protest, she added, "That way we can hang out and catch up with everything that has happened when we last saw each other." With how erratic and random the Loops were, they could spend well over a dozen of loops before they met again.

"I guess you win this time, Carol." Ben sighed in defeat but took the whole thing with stride.

And so the two of them marched on towards Carol's house talking and sharing the whole way there.

"Say, can I call you Lil' Band for the rest of the Loop?"

"No."

4.6 DrTempo

Peacock Awoke to find herself what looked like an arena. As she looked around, she was utterly confused.

"What is this Loop?"

"Welcome to the Video Game Championship Wrestling Loop."

Peacock turned around to see Samus Aran. "Cool. Wonder if Beowulf's here?"

Samus shrugged. "I think he's in another league in this Loop. Anyhow, as to what you're doing here... You were just hired by me. I'm the GM, one of them anyway. It's a long story. You have your first match tonight."

Peacock grinned. "So, what type of match is it, and who's the poor sap I'm fighting?"

Samus chuckled. "You're facing Videl, who as far as I know, isn't a Looper. The match type is Extreme Rules."

Peacock grinned, and cracked her knuckles. "Now that is my kind of match! This is going to be good!"

After the match, Samus was pleased by Peacock's performance. "That was brutal, especially when you punched Videl right through the announcer's table."

Peacock smiled. "I know! I was not expecting that!"

"The physics of this Loop cause strange things to happen sometimes," Samus stated simply. "Still, looks like this is going to be an interesting Loop."

Peacock just smirked. "Bring it on! This will be fun!"

4.7 Cyberbeta

Ben kept a comforting sound coming out of his instruments as he waited for Patricia and Marie to arrive. Carol sat close with her mask

off just basking in the music; Brain Drain was dead again so her thoughts were her own. The sound of Patricia's Bandwagon roaring in and screeching to a halt brought an end to the peaceful scene.

"What's up big guy? Marie and I were planning to tour the world and see what the other Kingdoms were like this loop."

"Just a little smooth jazz while waiting for you two." Ben tucked his instruments under his coat before unpocketing a couple of files. "I just came out of a Hub loop and have some research you might want to hear about our branch."

Marie unpocketed a table and her tea set and started preparing some Jasmine tea for everyone. "Am I to assume this might impact us in some significant way?"

Carol made her way over and Marie raised three Bone chairs with cushions for herself and the other two girls. Ben nodded as he took a seat on the ground next to the table. "I looped as Rich Brown so it was interesting being able to be my own voice. It also let me take a closer look at what was our Expansion before we started looping or were safe enough to activate."

Before he could continue, Avery popped out from under Patricia's hat dressed like a referee and blowing a whistle. "Misunderstanding of Time Loops. 5 Min penalty for you trying to toot your own horn," Avery squawked.

"Aw, lay off Avery." Patricia reached up and forced her hat back into place. "Ain't his fault he made a wrong assumption on the recompiling of the temporal mechanic data. t's not like he's a Time lord or a Toon and used to thinking in 4D quantum mechanics."

Avery popped out on Patricia's shoulder. "You ain't either," he squawked. "But you are looney enough that you got a Acme Looniversity degree back when we hit that Toon World Loop. Especially in the older style jokes & Pratfalls. Didn't you need help in the mandatory temporal class?"

Carol nodded thanks to Marie before sipping her tea as the two bickered. Solid foods would still be a while in coming, but at least liquids no longer all tasted like blood. "Trust a... loony half-toon... to understand... the loops better."

Ben sighed. "Are you done?"

Avery and Patricia both looked sheepish before he jumped back into her hammerspace.

Ben set the folder down and used his claws to pull out several sheets and pass them around. "Back on subject, I found out that due to luck and the way the backups of our branch was recovered and reflected as a vote in the Hub, we are actually less stable than we could have been." He pointed to a list of names on one of the sheets. "Had two of the first three people on this list been chosen, we would have been a lot more stable."

All three girls took a closer look at their papers before Patricia spoke up. "You're telling us, that had the tree decided a different reflection of how the people decided who could be played after this 'funding event', we would of had more info on what Marie went through."

"That, and possibly what she would have done after taking out the Medicis. I played though the game a few times as well when I was not working, and I was not getting a pretty picture. But I also point to the third name." He tapped the baton he used for his triangle on his own paper to draw their attention back to it.

"Dahlia. So, that crazy woman that shows up whenever we storm the Medici HQ was a key to stability... whoda thought." Patricia leaned back before taking a sip of the tea without thinking. Her eyesockets widened as she fought not to spit out what was in her mouth. Jasmine did not mix well with the aftertaste in her mouth from the brand of cigars she had been smoking on her way in.

Marie took this moment to speak back up as Carol ran a finger down the list looking for familiar names. "Umbrella is the other one besides

myself who would be easy to believe as being key, considering her both her older sister and mother's importance." Sitting back and looking at Ben, Marie looked at him as if asking to expand on this info.

"Stability was one thing, but there was another. Except for one name this list has a second, more important reason."

Carol took this moment to speak up for the first time. "Possible Loopers."

Ben nodded as Marie and Patricia took a closer look at the list of names. Carol tapped at one name specifically. "He Loops... he dies... If I'm Awake."

Patricia nodded in agreement. "Now that we know how cuckoo he is I agree wholeheartedly. No Brain Drain in the same loop as me."

Ben frowned at this. "Leave him to me Patricia, you have enough with your promise about Marie."

Patricia frowned but nodded. "Anything else?"

"Not for now, go get to planning your vacation."

A few minutes after the Bandwagon roared off again, Ben turned to Carol with a sad look visible over his breathing mask. "I thought you should hear this part alone, and decide if they should know." Carol gave him a questioning look as he continued. "I found some extra info about your old life, and about Filia."

Carol's eyes widened as she heard this. "Good...or bad?"

"Mostly bad... I know it's cliché, but you might want to take a seat."

Carol sat on the grass, slightly scared. What Ben told her next shook her world. How Filia may have inadvertently been behind Valentine

choosing her to become The Painwheel. How Filia now no longer knew her or anything from her old life; that she had told her Parasite Sampson to wipe her memory and then not tell her that he had done it. That her friend was a Medici only by blood having erased her past so thoroughly, and that she now sought to undo what she had asked for.

Worst of all, how she now might have some sort of nightmare clone haunting her dreams trying to replace her when she slept.

Carol did something that she had regained due to her time in the DC Loop with Ben; she cried. She cried for herself, and for her friend who had lost almost as much as she had.

4.8 XeroM52

"Oh boy! Annie is about to start!" Peacock jumped excitedly on the couch as she turned on the TV. "Come on Marie! We don't want to miss it."

"Patricia… don't you ever grow tire of watching the same show over and over again?" Marie questioned as she reluctantly joined Peacock on the couch.

"Of course not!" Peacock answered, almost appalled that Marie would suggest such a thing. "Yes, some episodes are the same, but I love to see all the tiny little differences the show has every Loop." She was a VERY devoted fan of the show. "But this time, the show's different! The title is 'Annie the StarGirl!' instead of the usual name 'Annie: Girl of the Stars.'"

Frankly the two titles sounded exactly the same to Marie. "Is that all, a change of title?"

"Well, it also doesn't have the live action segments with the voice actress dressed as Annie," Peacock explained, not entirely sure how

to feel about this new change in the show. Sure the live action sections were corny and campy as hell, but had this old timey charm to it. "But I'm sure they make up for that with more time for extended fight scenes." And that was always the best parts of the episodes. "It's going to be awesome!"

"I'm sure…" Marie might not like the show as Patricia did, but as long as her friend was happy she was too.

"Shshsh, it's starting!" Peacock said, completely enthralled by the images on TV. Getting to see a brand new Annie show was like drinking ambrosia, she could just die here 'cause it wasn't going to get better than this.

Then the opening started, showing the tone for the show and let everyone know what this 'New' Annie was all about.

And soon enough it ended.

"Well, that was something new…" Marie commented to a catatonic Peacock. "Patricia…? Are you okay?"

As soon as she place her hand over the shoulder of her unmoving friend, Patricia started to cry. Well, she came as close as she could come to crying without functional tear ducts.

"Noooo! What is this bullcrap! This can't be real, please tell me this isn't real!" The distraught girl proceeded to pinch herself several times, as if attempting to wake up from a dream. "This must be a terrible dream! An illusion devised by Satan himself!"

"Patricia! Calm down!" Marie did what every TV show had taught her to do in situation like this one, and slapped Peacock's face until she regained her senses.

"Ow! Ow! Ow! Marie! Ow! Stop! Ow! I'm fine! I'm fine!" Peacock pouted as she rubbed her sore cheeks, "You didn't have to go overboard like that."

"Well you shouldn't have overreacted over a TV show like that," the maid retorted, crossing her arms. "Seriously, it wasn't that bad."

"Not that bad?! They tarnished Annie's image!" The angry Peacock pointed at the TV which was showing this bastardization of her idol. "That… That thing isn't Annie!"

"Well, it is a Magical Girl Show for little girls…" Marie tried to rationalize why this new change wasn't bad.

"Annie may be a Magical Girl for little girls as you say, but she was more than just that! She was a hero, a fighter that never gave up no matter how difficult things got!" It was a show with great morals in it. "Annie taught us that no matter how small you are, with a big enough heart and the will to fight for what you believe in you can kick all sort of ass!" A show with incredible dilemmas and actions sequences. "And she told us girls that we can be strong and never have fear, inspiring us to overcome the discrimination and misogyny that perpetuates our society today!" Truly an inspiration for girls everywhere.

"And this show can't do all of that because…?"

"Do you really think this cutesy, moe-moe, let's all be friends and have tea parties and fashion shows version of Annie could do that?" Peacock rudely pointed towards the screen again. "Heck there isn't a single mention of Skullgirls in the entire opening! She is a Skullgirl hunter, no! THE Skullgirl hunter!"

"I for one like that aspect of this new show." Marie really felt uncomfortable with all the Anti-Skullgirl propaganda that Annie's shows were known for; it wasn't exactly wrong since they truly were beings of chaos, destruction and mass genocide, including her, but Marie didn't liked to be reminded of that every single episode.

"You would say that, you never loved Annie the way I do!" Peacock accused angrily.

"Indeed, I do not love Annie," Marie declared coldly. "But I do love someone who loves Annie, and that is why I never complained about watching the show before."

"Marie…" Peacock looked down, feeling regretful. "Hey… I… I didn't mean to flip up on you like that… I… you're right, I overreacted… I'm sorry…"

"It's alright. I forgive you," Marie said, giving her friend a big hug. "Although I have got to admit, this version of the show looks pretty bad."

"I know… for a moment there, I became one of the things I despise the most. An Easily-angered-overly-whiny nerd." She spat that last word with contempt. "Good thing I have you here to keep me on the line. You are my rock."

"And you are my anchor," Marie said with a smile.

"Ha! I see what you did there!"

"So, are you going to give up on Annie this Loop?" the maid wondered.

"Nah. I'll still watch it." Peacock shrugged. "It may be stupid, but it is still Annie… besides I'm sure in a few hundred Loops we can look back and laugh at it."

"That sounds nice…" Marie just rolled her eyes, but still smiled. "But I do wonder how the rest of the fanbase would react to this show."

"Big Sis? Where are you?" Umbrella shouted across the halls of the Renoir Castle searching for her sister. "Big Sis, come out!"

But what little Umbrella didn't know was that Parasoul was inside her secret room where she had stashed all of her Annie: Girl of the Stars

memorabilia and collectables. Heck there was even a shrine for Annie as well.

"They ruined it… they ruined it…" Parasoul shed tears as she hugged her massive sized plushie of Sagan of the cosmos, the magical bunny companion of Annie. "No… they ruined it."

Inside of her home, Annie, Voice and Live action actress for Annie: Girls of the Stars, who was in fact, a REAL Magical Girl and a REAL Skullgirl hunter, looked at her 'New Show' with disdain.

"Tch. Those MotherBonkers…! This show is a massive piece of shitaki mushrooms." And worst of all she under contract for two more seasons of this rotten garbage. "I would end myself if I weren't already immortal."

Right next to her, her partner Sagan, a white rabbit that held Annie's eye on his mouth, just nodded in agreement.

"Globdarnit, how I wish I could fudging curse." Instead she was stuck using PG versions of insults she knew. "Thanks a lot MOM."

4.9 XeroM52

If one could describe the atmosphere inside of Sir Integra Fairbrook Wingates Hellsing office, they wouldn't be able to exclude all the swear words.

"You look angry," Peacock pointed out, breaking the silence. "Are you angry, Inty? If so, you can always count on me to provide a shoulder and an ear when you-"

"Silence!" Integra interrupted the girl's nonsensical blabber by slamming her desk. "I want to know what exactly you were thinking when we sent you to Ireland for that mission? Just tell me!" She

opened a file and started reading. "Why the hell did you break into every single store around the city, stel all the cereal boxes you could, and stuff it inside the ghouls we sent you to kill and hide their bodies all around Ireland?!"

"I was hunting for Leprechauns!" Peacock said as it was the most obvious thing in the world. "That's why I put the cereal inside those ghouls, to use them as bait; those little rascals can't resist the delicious marshmallows that Lucky Charms provides!"

"There are no Leprechauns!"

"What?!" Peacock shouted angrily. "This world has Vampires, Werewolves, and Regenerators but not dancing little green men with pots of gold at the end of a rainbow? What kind of stupid world is this place?" Clearly she was really disappointed. "I even dressed myself like this!" she said, showing off another of her palette-swaps.

"Even if they were real," Integra said, "why in the bloody hell would they be attracted to Lucky Charms!" Really, the jumps in logic behind that plan of hers baffled her.

"It worked with the other cereal! Didn't it, Marie?" Peacock turned to her best friend Marie for support.

"She does have a point there, Master Hellsing," Marie agreed with Patricia as she petted a red eyed white rabbit that was eating a bowl filled with Trix Cereal.

"What about this report that says that you destroyed and smashed all the watermelons and pumpkins you could find in almost all of Ireland?" Integra asked as she turned to the next page of the file.

"I was making sure they were not Fruit Vampires!" Peacock said. "Don't you know they could transform into such monsters if kept for too long after harvesting and exposed to the full moon?"

"That's a Romani myth, you fool!" Integra shouted angrily.

"On the good side of things, the ones that were not smashed are now into our possession!" Marie pointed out. "We have enough pumpkins and watermelons to last us at least 3 seasons." She held out a freshly cut watermelon for Integra to taste.

"What about this?!" Integra flipped the page. "You and Anderson teleporting all the way to America into a Best Buy in Colorado where you started shouting: 'Please help me, this priest wants to fuck me' over and over again?"

"Fuck me UP!" Peacock corrected. "Really, people just hear what they want to hear! Seriously, get your mind out of the gutter!"

"I can attest to that!" Marie said with a nod. She had seen this situations play so many times in anime before. "Not to mention that in order to prevent a lawsuit, Best Buy gave us an entire entertainment center which included 72 inch plasma TV."

"And this?!" she flipped to the last part of the file. "You stole a prototype tank from a secret USA military complex, covered half of it in Halloween Skull Stickers, filled the inside with the severed heads of the bosses of several criminal organizations including: Yakuza, Chinese Triads, Russian Mafia, Italian Mafia, Mexican Cartels among others; and then ram it into a Starbucks and left a note saying: 'Couldn't find enough stickers, now my gift is worthless. Fuck you! Christmas is ruined.' "

"You couldn't possibly expect me to give an unfinished Christmas gift to Marie!" Peacock defended her actions. "What kind of friend does that?"

"If it came from you, I still would've loved it," Marie reassured her while looking sideways, trying to hide her blush of the thought of Patricia giving her such a thoughtful and elaborate Christmas gift.

Integra glared at the little gremlin in front of her with enough ire that she didn't care if she popped a vessel. This lasted just a few moments before the english woman give a heavy sigh in order to

control herself and not kill the girl. "Do you have any idea how much money and manhours it would take to cover this whole thing up?"

"Relax! What kind of comedic psychotic murderer do you think I am?" Peacock shrugged unworriedly. "You think I would leave clues behind that would connect all of this back to us? Of course not!"

Integra's only response was to pull out a cell phone that showed a Twitter page that read 'The Orphan Crippler' and a message that said: 'I did some crazy shit last night, pics included -'. The link next to the arrow went to a private page that hosted the photos of what Peacock did that night.

"Pfft… That can be explained as simple Photoshop. Besides, the only witness would be Anderson, but he wouldn't talk. His pride wouldn't let him!" Not to mention everyone would thought he was nuts….

"Well… there's that at least," Integra admitted begrudgingly. ' *I should've listened to Marie when she said not to underestimate Peacock's behavior.* ' At least she wasn't as bad as the Crismon Fucker; that version of Alucard was way more obnoxious. Speaking of obnoxious…

"Marie, Peacock…" Integra called for their attention. "In a few days, the Valentine Brothers will come and attack the mansion; I want you to take care of them."

"Yeah! Alright!" Peacock pumped her fist in cheer.

"And I want you to keep the collateral to minimum," Integra interrupted her. "Please do not destroy the mansion, or take the fight to the middle of London or any other city of the world." She directed her look at Peacock. That teleporting ability of hers was impressive, but it caused problems like the ones the last mission caused. "And please make sure our soldiers survive."

"We will do as you wish, Master Hellsing," Marie said, bowing politely. When her friend didn't do the same she rammed her elbow into her sides.

"Ow! I… Yeah, whatever you say," Peacock also bowed, only because Marie made her to.

"Good, now you may retire." Integra said.

She watched the two girls exit her office talking amigably with each other. ' *I still can't believe the two of them are this close,* ' Integra pondered. They were so different but they complemented each other so well in a strange sort of manner. ' *Good thing Marie is here.* ' She was the only one that could calm Peacock down and put her on her place.

Suddenly the red eyed white rabbit hopped on top of her desk and started munching on the freshly cut watermelon that Marie had left behind. Not only that, it also pooped a little on an important document.

"MARIE! COME BACK HERE!"

3.8 (con't) Masterweaver

[Skullgirls][Harry Potter]

Right from her sorting Minerva knew Patricia Watson would be an odd one-especially after the sorting hat asked her to tell Dumbledore that the girl was off limits to legilimens. Her motions were oddly jerky-almost clumsy, with an emphasis on almost, since she never quite fell. She would literally pour food from her plate into her mouth-an odd twist of her jaw later, she would practically swallow it whole. When Dumbledore allowed them to sing the school song to any tune, she picked something that Minerva recognized as a blues riff.

The next morning, all of Patricia's dormmates had been found sleeping on couches in the main room. Apparently, after tying six blindfolds to her arms and putting a final one carefully over her eyes, the girl had fallen asleep right away... and woken them all with an enraged scream, threatening to paint the walls with blood for 'taking away her arms'. It had been only after she rolled over and murmured something about a cartoon rabbit giving her a test that the girls realized she was still asleep, and decided to move out.

Upon being confronted about it, Patricia had apologized to them and promised to put soundproofing around her bed as soon as possible. Marie had shown up, somehow circumventing the gryffindor password system, and offered to assist in the installation, before gently leading her down to the dining hall.

Minerva had assumed, then, that the girl would need careful, gentle attention. She had been partially correct-the girl needed attention, and great care was also necessary.

The girl had that odd sort of knack for magic that could be considered brilliant or utterly incompetent, depending on how one looked at it. When she performed charms, it was never with the right word or want motion-yet it always worked despite her gibberish. Snape similarly reported an odd case-the girl let her cauldron go through a few dramatic explosions with maniacal cackles, the potions she turned in were always either acceptable or excellent. She and Marie had formed an unusual partnership in the herbology classroom; Marie seemed unable to touch a plant without it withering, but her technical knowledge covered Patricia's lack of subtlety. And in her own class, Minerva found the girl to be almost a prodigy-almost, because turning a matchstick into a needle that sang raunchy drinking songs was not *quite* the assignment she'd assigned.

Patricia's other classes tended to-well, not suffer, exactly, her grades were reasonable, but she certainly didn't respect them. Midway through her first DADA class she'd called Quirrel a two-faced two timer and declared her and Marie would do their own independent

study of the subject, only ever dropping by again to turn in assignments. She had flat out replaced Binns for her fellow students, shooing the ghost away or speaking over him in her own improvised lectures on magic history-lectures that were dismissive and crude and, according to Flitwick after his attempted intervention, remarkably adept at teaching the students. Astronomy seemed normal, at least... well, until she casually let drop that she finished the work early to work on her 'routines.'

Her routines...

Patricia Watson, apparently, fancied herself a comedian. A connoisseur of humor in all its forms, be it slapstick, puns, jokes... or pranks. That last bit incited a rivalry with the already troublesome Weasley twins, who had established themselves as magical pranksters and enablers of pranks, skirting the rules for a lark (and to see whether the rules were worth following in the first place). The first time they had pranked her, she had laughed along with them... and then casually revealed her own counterprank, leaving them tied up from the roof. Thus the war was started-or, well, a war would have been bad enough, but the twins and the girl appeared to respect each other enough to determine the other's methods and improve upon it, occasionally collaborating on particularly aggressive pranks together.

Minerva privately wondered if she might secretly be a Weasley herself. She certainly had the hair for it.

It had all come to a head, though, when some Slytherin girl made the mistake of calling Marie a freak... during lunch. That was when everyone learned that Patricia had incredibly good hearing, excellent conjuration skills, a quick and dangerous tongue, and a disturbing level of knowledge on exactly how much damage a child could take.

It was also when they learned that Marie was capable of calming her down, getting her to apologize, and resetting bones. She had requested to be present at Patricia's detention, in a polite tone laced with just a hint of warning.

Minerva had been rather surprised when Snape had acquiesced.

4.10 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Madoka Magica]

Marie was seating alone in the Grand Cathedral, doing something she hadn't done in who knows how long: playing the piano. To her, the grand piano was one of the most refined instruments ever created and it let her express in great ways her inner feelings. Despite her love for the instrument, she barely had any motive or time to play it anymore; that is until this Loop where Double was nowhere to be seen, and instead she had quite the famous visitor.

"So, in this world girls can get anything they want by wishing upon the Skull Heart?" Kyubey, a small white alien 'animal' (for lack of a better word), said as it look at Marie playing the piano.

"Girls and women, alike," Marie answered honestly. "Any female that can utter words is capable of wishing upon it." As long as they could talk and they were female, it was fair game for the Heart.

"What about a genderless being?" the white cat/rabbit asked curiously.

"I don't know." She truly didn't. It had never happened before, so she couldn't say if the Heart would accept it or not. "Planning on killing me and get the heart for yourself to see if you can make a wish?" Marie looked away from the keys and looked at Kyubey directly in the eye.

The travelling Looper just remained silent. That is, until it asked another question. "So those who wish upon the Skull Heart, do they always become Skullgirls?"

"Yes," Marie answered without a doubt. "Supposedly if you have a pure heart the Skull Heart will grant your wish without transforming you into a Skullgirl but…"

"The idea of a pure heart making a wish is paradoxical since the act wishing is in itself selfish and that is something that corrupts a pure heart," the small MLE finished for Marie. "Am I correct?"

"Very…" She had give it to the white rodent, it was a lot more clever than its cutesy appearance would lead one to believe.

"So, did your wish come true?" it asked to Marie since she was a Skullgirl.

"In a way…" Marie responded with a distant look on her eyes. "Why the interest?" she asked suspiciously.

"I wanted to know, because if you weren't satisfied by it, you could ask me for a wish."

"Why me? I'm sure there are thousands of other girls out there whom could make a contract with you," Marie pointed out, flatly.

"The story of the Skull Heart is well known in your world," it explained. "I doubt any girl would jump at the chance of having a wish granted, knowing the consequences of doing so."

"You'll be surprised." Despite the Heart being ancient and its dangers well-known, people everywhere stupidly fought over it like hungry dogs after the last piece of meat.

"Not to mention that I'm curious as to what sort of being would come out if a Skullgirl makes a contract with me. It would almost be like a witch being able to make a contract."

"Hm…" Marie hummed as she thought it over. "It sounds intriguing." Besides, as a fully transformed Skullgirl, she was suppose to be an empty husk for the will of the Skull Heart to take over, but instead

she managed to keep her sense of self. "As I think over your offer… want to sing a song with me?" Marie offered.

"Sing? Why?"

"Why not?" Marie countered back. "Besides, it would help me reach come to a decision if I should make a wish or not."

"If I do this, would you make a wish?"

"I said it would help me make a decision…" Marie repeated just to make things clear between them. "The better you sing the more chances you'll have of me making a contract with you."

"What are the words I shall sing?" Kyubey asked.

"We'll improvise! I'll start, and then when you are ready you join in."

It nodded in acceptance. "Very well."

Marie proceeded to play a smooth and upbeat melody that sounded too cheerful for the atmosphere inside the Grand Cathedral.

" *Why so down tonight?*

Just another day that didn't go your way.

Well, don't you make a sigh.

Just take my hand. Don't toss and turn.

Let's just lie awake.

In just a moment's time, you'll wonder why you

Ever thought you'd ever look, for more than you've got

'Cause, baby, you've got you and me!"

Marie continued to play and sing in perfect harmony with the melody. Kyubey just stood and stared, thinking about what it should do. On one hand it failed to see how singing would help the Skullgirl make a wish, but on the other hand if it didn't sing, then Marie wouldn't make the wish. So after Marie ended another verse, Kyubey jumped in singing the first thing it came to the mind.

" *Girl, you made the right mistake*

Choose me instead of constant heartbreak

Now let's raise the stakes. Go on, you've earned it

Ask for any wish, I'm on it

Granted word for word, I promise

Baby, that's the charm. You got it made, yes

Don't you be afraid.

In just a moment's time, you'll wonder why you

Ever thought you'd ever look, For more than you've got

'Cause, baby, you've got you and me."

Kyubey didn't understand where those lyrics came from and frankly it couldn't really care for it. Instead the white alien wondered if what it just sang was satisfactory enough or if further singing was necessary.

Marie continued to play without singing just to take a small break. Just when she was about to return to her singing, another person stepped in and contributed to the song.

" *Ooh! Buckle up tonight.*

You wanna get away. Forget it, baby.

Got you in my sights

They never got, They don't ever learn."

The unexpected visitor was none other than Marie's dearest Peacock. Moved by the Melody from the piano, she couldn't resist joining in. Peacock sang while walking towards Marie and looking directly at her, never diverting her gaze.

" *Hell, for heaven's sake!*

In just a moment's time, you'll wonder why you

Ever thought you'd ever look. For more than you've got."

Once she was near enough, Peacock sat next to Marie at the Grand Piano.

" *'Cause, baby, you*

You've got you and me."

And for the grand finale, the cyborg girl planted a kiss upon the undead maid's cheek.

"So? How was I? Pretty good, huh?" Peacock asked as Marie finished playing the song. "Maybe we should take a Vacation Loop and made a record together! What about a Christmas Hip-Hop album?"

Marie giggled. "That would be nice." She turned to the white furry creature. "As for you, I'm afraid I'll not make any wishes today."

"Why? Was my singing insufficient?" Kyubey asked, confused.

"No. It was rather nice coming from you." Who would've guessed it, but the rodent didn't sound half bad. "It just that as you can see," she signaled Peacock and herself. "I already have everything I could ever want."

"Damn straight!" Peacock said with a grin. "But don't be sad, Skippy! I'll make a wish!"

"Tell me then, what is your wish?" Kyubey may have lost the opportunity to make have a contract with a Skullgirl, but a contract with this other girl would suffice.

"I wish for all the entropy of this universe to be turned into vanilla ice cream that tastes like chocolate served inside a peanut bag with no bottom while riding a blue police box that is bigger on the inside than the outside on a stormy day raining sprinkle donuts."

"What?" Kyubey asked, REALLY confused. "I do not understand this wish at all."

"And that is why you and the Heart suck as wish granters!" Peacock said bluntly. "Now get the eff out my Loop!" She shot Kyubey with the special lazer from her arm eyes that she used on the ant when she summoned it, making the MLE disappear. "Good riddance."

"You know there are multiple copies of him running around." Marie pointed out.

"I know! Why do you think I arrived late today?" Peacock laughed, and soon Marie joined her as well.

"Oh you."

4.11 Masterweaver

"...ooookay. What?"

"This is a nice change of pace," Marie mused.

"I guess," Peacock allowed, "it's just..." She gestured around vaguely at the utopia they found themselves in. "Sort of... boring, you know?"

"Patricia," Marie admonished playfully, "you can't be entirely violent all the time."

"No, not what I meant. I mean... it's still New Meridian, but there's no Medici, para-er, Theon prejudice is at an all-time low, Fer-uh, Zootopians aren't being treated like shit, you couldn't tell I lost my arms and legs in a car crash cause the ones that the government got me look completely real-you aren't the skullgirl, Marie! *There's no such thing!* It's... it's weird!"

"Oh, very," Marie agreed brightly. "But that doesn't mean we can't enjoy ourselves." She giggled as Carol practically skipped by them. "See, she has the right idea."

"I mean... what the f-"

A hand clapped over Peacock's non metallic teeth. "We are innocent little girls and shall behave as such, understood?"

Peacock rolled her eyes, but nodded.

Marie removed her hand.

"Like I was saying, what the... *heck* happened?!"

"Variant, probably." Marie grabbed her hand. "Now come on, it's been too long since I had an actual stomach and I want to weigh it down with fudge."

"Alright, toots, let's get you sugared up."

A green-haired girl atop the rooftops watched the pair go, her one-eyed expression lightly amused. "Variant. Right."

It was interesting how killing one power-mad theon knocked down dominoes through history. At least she'd been allowed to grow up this loop...

4.12 Masterweaver

Perhaps it was the fractured nature of their particular spacetime, or perhaps it was that visiting loopers preferred not to reveal themselves, or perhaps... something else, entirely. Whatever the reason, there were loops where Patricia was not Awake, and Marie... was alone.

She always dealt with Double and Valentine those loops-she usually also tracked down Brain Drain and put him down too. Eliza... as much as Eliza deserved to be put down, Marie had found ignoring her usually led to the woman simply remaining a casual hedonist instead of indulging in more destructive urges. Breaking the Medici, well, that was...

Not *fun* , exactly. It wasn't fun without Patricia, anyway. But it felt... right. Cathartic.

Some girls went shopping, some curled up with a good book, and Marie killed Medici scum. There were worse hobbies. Mostly practiced by Medici scum.

The point was, Marie was bored. And boredom, for a looper, was the ultimate suffering. The one thing they liked to avoid, above all else. So as she suctioned another screaming goon's face into her trusty vacuum, Marie pondered what to do.

...she could try to start a flower garden-no, her and growing things had a rather difficult relationship. Go on a date with-no, no, Patricia wasn't Awake, she'd see her as just the Skullgirl. Open a boutique... hmm. Maybe. There was certainly a market for unique clothing... ferals would have interesting problems. The sliced up cat girl especially, if she wasn't plucked up by Eliza. Didn't she live in Little Innsmouth...?

A boutique for dagonions. Dragon empire designs... yes, yes, that could work. It might be a challenge, considering the neighborhood,

but a challenge might well be what she needed.

With a twirl of her vacuum's canister, she broke the spine of the thug sneaking up behind her and nodded firmly. The Boneyard Boutique... it had a nice ring to it. She sucked the last cadaver into her grip and walked out of the room, humming a showtune to herself.

4.13 XeroM52

"Happy Trinity Day Everyone!"

The atmosphere inside the chambers of Lab 8 was full of merriment as all of the Lab Kids sat around the Trini-tree and opened all of their presents. The scene was really heartwarming to see, knowing how austere a life inside the Labs was. All of these kids were at some point orphans or abandoned kids, who were left to fend for themselves in the harsh outside world, most of which couldn't last a week. Now the Labs gave them a new chance at life, serving as test subjects for the implementation of new cybernetic body parts or artificial parasites, in order to create the future weapons that would help fight the Skullgirls. Say what you would about the moral implications of taking unwanted kids off the streets to use for experiments; those experiments saved these children's lives, and Ileum knew they were happier here than on the streets. She was just the head nurse of Lab 8, but she cared and loved each and every single one of them. And that was why she was so insistent on celebrating Trinity Day, to brighten up their lives even just a little.

"They are all so precious…" Ileum whispered to herself.

She was surprised when someone stepped next to her and replied.

"They sure are…"

"Ben?" The nurse turned to look at the massive cyborg and friend. "I thought you wouldn't be able to come…"

"I thought so too…" Big Band said, as if reminiscing about something. She had no idea what it was. "But I managed it and it seems I arrived just in time."

"That you did…"

"Hey It's Big Band!" one of the children said, making the rest to turn and look to the detective and cheer. "Yay!" The lab children surrounded him and began jumping up and down excited, tug on his coat or try to climb him, all because they were happy to see him.

"Calm down, Calm down," Ben gently said, "I'm happy to see you too."

"Hey, BB? Do you have any more stories about crooks you captured?" asked one of the boys, who wore glasses while the lower half of his jaw and neck were completely metallic.

"Not only that, I also brought some gifts for everyone," Ben answered with a smile as everyone cheered and tried to hug him.

After more presents were opened, the Lab children all began to play around, while both Big Band and Ileum kept an eye on them.

"Look how happy they are…" Ileum said with a small sigh. Although it warmed her heart, she couldn't help but remember that this happiness and merriment would be short lived. "How I wish they would always be this happy."

"They are," Ben nodded. "They have you."

It wasn't a secret that Ileum cared for these children as if they were her own, and in turn they loved her like she was their mother. "And I'm happy too but…" She knew a life of isolation within these chambers wasn't exactly the best life, even if it was much better than their previous one before they all arrived here. Not only that, these children were destined to become the next generation of superweapons against the Skullgirl; that saddened her even more.

Ileum's thoughts on the matter were cut short when she felt a hand rest on her shoulder. "Ile… I know what you are thinking right now, and I can sympathize…" Ben was familiar with how difficult the life within the Labs was, when he too was saved by them and had to undergo therapy in order to get accustomed to his new body. "But as long as they have you by their side, their lives would never truly be sad. In fact, if it hadn't been for you back then I wouldn't have recovered as well as I did."

"Ben…" Ileum remembered, all those years ago when a half dead police officer was brought here to the lab and underwent heavy surgery in order to give him a new experimental body. She was there when he was on the operating table, she was there for the physical therapy, and she was there when he was first deployed to combat the Skullgirl 15 years ago.

"You help me change my life for the better, and I'm sure it is the same for these kids." Big Band's words really got her teary eyed behind her porcelain mask. "Not to mention both Leduc and Hive, they've grown quite well under your care." Leduc was a bright young boy who would go on to do great things and Hive had learned a lot under the nurse's tutelage. "And with Peacock… eh… without you she would've probably leveled the whole place by now."

Now that made the nurse chuckle a bit. "That girl is quite handful…" A tomboyish troublemaker, and the Double Parasitic integration didn't do anything any favors. "Dr. Avian is sure that she is the perfect weapon against the skullgirl, and with time there will be no more need for more…" Meaning that the rest of children would never have to be deployed for battle.

"That means we can finally retire…" Big Band joked, while secretly wondering what would Ileum's reaction would be if he told her about the close relationship Peacock shared with the current Skullgirl. "I can finally write down my memories and turned them into bestselling detective novels, and you can take on gardening like you always wanted."

"That was before the war…" Ileum slightly lamented. "Before… the accident…" She gently placed her hand upon the porcelain mask occluding her face. "I don't think I'll be received well by the outside… and here in the Labs there's no way to grow any greenery." At least not in the traditional way without the aid of experimental procedures like she preferred.

"I…Sorry…" Ben regretted bringing up the topic, forgetting for just a second the circumstances of Ileum's outside look.

"It's okay, don't worry about it." She had accepted the reality of her outside look a long time ago. It was by her own decision to be grafted with her Artificial Parasite Salamander Shell to save her life and continue with her duty.

"You know… whenever I look at you I never see Salamander Shell…" Big Band confessed.

"Your optic nerves must be damaged."

"No, I'm serious. When I look at you I keep seeing that nurse who saved my life never left my side while I was recuperating."

"Ben…" That was truly one of the kindest things someone had ever said to her. "I wish I could say the same about you… I only know you as your current self," the nurse confessed in a well mannered manner way, not meant to insult him.

The detective just smirked at the jab against him. "Fair enough, I guess."

The two of them continued to talk about the past, when suddenly Hive appeared.

"Hey, BB… Happy Trinity Day," the teen girl greeted in her usual tone of laid-backness. Something that wasn't unexpected from a teenage girl.

"Happy Trinity Day," Big Band greeted back, not really bothered by the girl's general attitude. "I thought you'll be outside by now looking for something to do." Unlike the other children, Hive could leave the Lab and visit the outside, since her own parasite Beelze Bomb was a mix of an implanted modifier and a wearable suit; with the suit off she would appear normal while still have access to her powers.

"That's what I plan to do. I have a social life you know," Hive answered rolling her eyes, which in turn made both adults roll their eyes too. They hoped that by now, the girl would've grown out of her prissy attitude.

' *Ironic that she manages to act like a Queen Bee without even going to school,* ' Ben silently thought, ' *Or maybe not, knowing what Beezle Bomb is capable of.* '

"You wouldn't understand anyway." Hive was about to bail out until something caught her eye. "Hey, why don't you look up, you two," she said with a smirk that usually spelled trouble to her fellow 'friend' Leduc.

Looking up, the two adults found a decorative Sand–Clock with a bow.

"You've got to kiss now," Hive said, keeping that smirk on her face. It was a tradition for Trinity Day and the season to kiss under the Sand-Clock, which represented the Goddess of Time, Aeon.

Both Big Band and Ileum look away from the hourglass and turned to each other and stared into each other's eyes in silence. The two of them had a lot of history together and they had known each other almost two decades now. They respected and care for each other a lot, especially when they help fight against the Skullgirl together during the war.

"No," they both declared at the same time.

"Eh?! Why not? It is tradition!" Hive insisted, but both adults kept on shaking their heads in disagreement.

"In your own words, 'You wouldn't understand'," Ileum countered back. Sure she cared for Ben a lot and she couldn't imagine her life without him, but she had never really felt compelled to kiss him or exhibit some kind of romance with him.

"Well said," Big Band agreed. He too cared a lot for Ileum and the children they two look after, but he was far too old and busted for display of affection like that.

Stanley, one of Dr. Avian's colleagues, often joked that both Ben and Ileum acted like a married couple who had been together for 20+ years. Instead of a roaring bonfire that was young love, theirs was a modest hearth whose fire burned humbly and keeps the home warm. Although he would keep insisting against the contrary, Big Band thought it was a semi-fitting description of what both he and Ileum shared.

"You guys aren't any fun…" Hive crossed her arms in front of her. "Such prudes."

"You'd be singing a different tune if it were you under the hourglass," Ben pointed out.

"Ha! That's where you are wrong, because I would never be caught unaware underneath one with someone I'll never want to kiss."

"Really…? Think again…" Now it was Ileum's turn to smirk, something that Hive could feel despite the mask.

"What are you…?" It took Hive a full second before getting what the two adults were getting at-but when she did, she jumped backwards, afraid that she too was under an hourglass. Unfortunately for her, her sudden jump caused her to accidentally smash into someone else, who was unprepared for the sudden collision, causing the two of them to fall.

"Hive!? Are you okay?" Leduc asked despite him been the one who softened the girl's fall into the ground.

"Leduc?!" Hive was surprised to look at the blond lab assistant, but that surprise didn't last long before it gave away for unexcused anger. "Why don't you see where you're going?"

"I'm sorry…" the blond apologized as he help her get up despite her been the one who rammed into him.

"Hey Hive! Why don't you look up?" the head nurse said, enjoying the surprised look on the teen girl when she found there was an hourglass over both her and Leduc.

"What?!"

"Guess you two have to kiss now!" Big Band joined in too.

"It was an accident! We just fell underneath it." Hive said defensively

The cyborg detective just shrugged. "Guess, you're a prude like us."

"K-K-Kiss?! With Hive?" poor Leduc stammered, getting redder by the second, not even his high collar could hide it.

"Don't you get funny ideas, you!" the girl threatened the blond before she turned to the adults. "You guys tricked me! So it doesn't count!"

"I thought you said you will never be caught unaware underneath one of them…" Ileum returned Hive's own words back to her, causing the pink head to get red in embarrassment and anger.

"You…" Hive muttered before dusting herself off and began to walk away. "You guys suck!" and with that she left the place.

"What was that all about?" Leduc asked as he got his blushing under control.

"Just teaching Hive a lesson about respecting their elders," Ileum answered. "Like any good mother would."

4.14 Awesomedude17

"Marie, I'm going for a walk." Peacock said.

"Patricia, you're a Hellsing vampire this Loop. Can I trust you to keep collateral damage to the bad things out there?"

"...probably?"

"...Go out on your walk. No innocents. Vampires are fair game."

"Thank you, Marie!" Peacock walked off.

Marie really didn't want the other shoe to drop.

Compiler's Commentary:

4.1: Drink responsibly! By which I of course mean not in mafia hangouts. Unless you're a deathbringer, in which case go nuts.

4.2: The multiverse is filled with many things-magic, idiots, magical idiots-but a good beat is always appreciated.

4.3: Peacock's sense of humor could, perhaps, be a tad more refined, but she's good at taking down the worst of the worst.

4.4: It can be hard to be an ordinary girl when your two galpals are a lich and a toon.

4.5: Mrs. Victoria never figured out why 'hot for teacher' played every time she entered the classroom.

4.6: The championship was, ultimately, won by Shantae.

4.7: Chronologistics of mutlitversal time loops can be pretty mindbending. Luckily, Peacock's got a warped mind already!

4.8: Remakes aren't... *always* terrible, right? Back me up here, guys... please?

4.9: There's such a thing as overkill. Peacock doesn't know about it. Marie does, but she doesn't want to break Peacock's spirits.

3.8 (con't): Quidditch was never the same after Peacock got hold of a broomstick.

4.10: Some creatures are truly dangerous to the multiverse. Kyubey is the most infamous malicious looping entity, having arranged for the destruction of its own reality. That said, it has had no success in any other...

4.11: It's amazing what can be accomplished when you don't have to focus on an eldritch lich rising to terrorize the world every seven years.

4.12: Do you realize how hard it is to design clothes for swimmers? You have to worry about drag, and dampness, and the fabric getting caught from all directions...

4.13: Holidays at Lab 8 are always interesting.

4.14: Always know where your loved ones are and what they're doing, but don't try to stop them being themselves!

And if you, dear reader, should wish to contribute your own snip, you are welcome to join us on the Indie Games Infinite Loops thread over on Spacebattles.

Nobody Blink

There are a lot of one-off events in the infinite loops, things that can be accepted as a joke or just some crazy thing that happened. But sometimes things happen that are a bit longer-lasting. This can be a good thing... or a very, very bad thing.

5.1 Drakohahn

[Skullgirls][Gundam Seed]

Kira Woke up to a place he hadn't in awhile. He found himself in a medical bay, though a much different one from the Archangel's. There was an IV drip and heart monitor off to one side to complete the image of a healing patient. When he tried to move, he found his body very heavy. It wasn't in the tired or injured sense, but in the weighed down sense. Blinking his eyes in the rather dim light compared to his memories of the Archangel's medical bay, he lifted his head enough to check himself over.

What he saw was definitely different than anything in his baseline. Instead of bandages for his injuries, his entire body was covered in some kind of organic metal. It wasn't like armor, but more like a second skin...at least, that was his guess from the sensation of touch he felt as he lay there. After a moment, he decided to check his loop memories to see how he got into this state.

The first part was fairly standard for him, being a student and lab assistant at a college where he worked on a human-sized powered frame with his friends. However, first difference was that it wasn't in a space colony like he was used to, but on Earth, while the second was the name of his professor. It wasn't Professor Kato, it was Dr. Avian. One day, while he and his friends were working on the powered frame in the lab, the building shook with explosions. The

next thing Kira remembered, he was drifting in and out of consciousness while occasionally catching glimpses of Dr. Avian standing over him and trying to assure Kira that he'd be alright.

So, that was it. He was finally fully awake after that incident. As he managed to get himself into a sitting position, the door to the medical bay would open and a very odd sight opened his bed's curtain. It was a young girl wearing a top hat with a matching dress, though that wasn't the strange part. She had thick razor sharp metal teeth and thin metal arms with large mechanical eyes attached to them. Also, she was grinning quite maniacally.

"Hey there, buddy. Are you feeling Loopy today?"

"I only just Woke up." Kira replied with a standard Looper greeting. So, this girl was also a Looper...good to know. "What about you, miss?"

"Ha, I'm always Loopy! Me and the whole gang! Say hi, everyone!"

Suddenly, she was surrounded by several cartoony...things. There was a bird dressed like she was sticking out of her top hat, an anvil with lanky human limbs wearing boxing gloves and an evil face, a weight with very bulky arms and stubby legs sporting a more human face than the anvil's, and a pair of bombs with cartoonish limbs, though one was the size of a grenade while the other was bigger than the girl.

"I'm Peacock! Who are you?"

"Kira Yamato," he replied. He slowly moved his legs so he could put his feet on the floor, noticing the confusion on the girl's face as he shifted. "I'm not used to this body yet, it seems. It's much heavier than my normal one."

"I'm sorry you had to find out this way, Kira."

The eyes of the young man on the bed bugged out. It was Dr. Avian.

"My job as professor at the college was mostly to look for candidates for the Anti-Skullgirls Lab. You and your friends showed great promise with that powered frame. It could have been a revolution in fighting Skullgirls. Sadly, you were the only one in any savable condition and the prototype went missing."

Well, that was certainly different. Shaking his head, Kira inquired about the changes to his body.

"It was a miracle you were able to survive as long as you did, but the damage was too great to fix by mere surgery. So, I decided to resort to an experimental Parasite. By the fact that you're still alive, I'd have to say the process succeeded."

Kira moved a stiff and weighty arm. "Mostly."

That seemed to set Peacock off, as she started laughing.

5.2 Cyberbeta

Marie Woke Up and suppressed the Skullheart as usual before sending out a Ping and checking her loop memories. Nothing seemed to have changed in the major details; Valentine had been forced to join after the crushing of the Last Hope, a chunk of the Medici Empire was dead and she was in the crypt resting after taking out the latest Medici stronghold and wiping it out to the last person.

Sounds of battle coming down the stairwell to the chapel indicated someone was probably challenging Double, which meant she was near the point where, if she survived, she would have one year left before the loop reset. Hearing the sounds come to an end she placed herself just out of easy sight of whoever came down the stairs.

She did not have to wait long for the sound of someone descending the stairs came to her ears. What was odd, though, was that it

sounded like more than one person was coming down the stairs. There was that variant where Squiggly and Filia decided to team up early and utterly destroy Double before coming after her, so it was possible this was a version of that. Or it could be Ben had talked Patricia into actually working with him this time instead of knocking him out under the bridge. That she had gotten no return ping indicated that Patricia had not Woke Up yet and might do so mid-fight.

Who she saw descend the stairwell, however, was the worst person possible.

Eliza looked around the crypt before making a comment on how the trail had ended and how dry the place was. Marie's mind raced as Horace and Albus bickered about the bones scattered about. She normally left Eliza alone; she learned how dangerous the vampyric singer really was during her research in her first Hub Loop. Now, however, she was stuck in a loop where the Medici blackmail had occurred and was forced to face the Crimson Scourge who caused the Skullheart to be created in the first place.

It could have been worse; she could have woken up in mid-battle with the monster and her minions.

As Eliza and her minions finished their banter, she noticed Eliza looking around, as if expecting her to be in the open and ready to challenge. Rather than show herself, she instead had skeletons leap upon the trio. Horace and Albus were quickly pinned, but Eliza shattered the bones with ease. Deciding to keep in hiding until she could get some backup or pull something from her pocket, Marie took advantage of the acoustics to bounce her voice.

"I know who you are Eliza... or should I say Nefertu? You and your sick partner Sekhmet are the reason the Skull Heart exists."

As Eliza preened while looking for the source of the voice, Marie felt the Skull Heart react to that news and stop struggling. *:HER!? The one who is the cause of my creation is HERE?!:*

" *Yes, and I know she is the real reason your creator is angry with the world."*

The Skull Heart went silent.

Marie noticed Eliza destroying the prisons on her minions, sending more skeletons to dogpile them as a delaying tactic. *"She has lived this long disguising her nature. She is worse than any Skullgirl you have unleashed on the world, but I don't know if I can stop her."*

Marie stiffened as she felt her flesh knit back together around her ribs, along with the maid outfit repairing itself.

:Alone you can not… end this monster and you will have Queen Lamia's gratitude. Possibly even enough leeway to have your wish truly granted.:

Marie froze as that was said. This was a rare opportunity, working with the Heart willingly...

With a nod, she swung into action, sending out a fresh wave of skeletons. She chose not to activate the massive veins to create her battlezone; instead she yelled at the top of her voice.

"VENUS AND AEON'S MURDERER IS HERE!"

Eliza turned towards the source of the yell, spotting Marie as she summoned her vacuum cleaner. "There you are, now why don't you-" She was cut off as she was slammed into the wall of the crypt by an enraged Double.

"You… Live… Murderer…" Double was so enraged she could barely speak.

Valentine unexpectedly appeared at the Crypt entrance and took in the now apparently living Marie and the club singer now transforming into a skeleton with blood flowing around it to slide out of Double's grasp.

She body flickered to Marie's side. "Do I want to know?"

Marie glanced at Valentine, before having her skeletons drag Horace and Albus over to them. "Basic summary, Eliza is a centuries-old parasite host with delusions of ruling the world who killed two of the Trinity and caused the third to create the Skull heart in rage and grief. Kill both of them permanently, and we might have no more Skullgirls ever after me."

Valentine's eyes widened before she looked down at the still bound minions. "And these two?"

Marie raised the Vacuum cleaner before firing skulls out of it like a rifle to support Double. "Willing minions who know what she is and don't care."

Valentine glared at the two before taking the bonesaw off her lower back and quickly separating their heads from their shoulders. Marie quickly vacuumed up the two corpses to deny Eliza any of their blood as a way to recharge.

"We need to get Eliza out of here." Marie flickered her gaze to the ground for a moment before sending a shadow to stomp Eliza into the ground; Double followed up with a replica of Patricia's Bandwagon ramming her back into another wall.

Valentine got the hint quickly. "Give me an opening and I can restrain her long enough for us to get her up and out."

Marie nodded. "As soon as we get her out of here, get your former comrades from the ASL, we will need all the help we can get. Also if you can, find some way to get the word out of what is really happening."

Valentine gave Marie a look before vanishing into the shadows.

Marie waited until Eliza was coming in for a landing after having dodged a Parasoul-shifted Double firing her gun before having a

group of paralyzing skeletons burst from the ground to clamp onto Eliza and hold her. Valentine took this moment to reappear and bound Eliza into a body bag. Looking at Double she gave a simple order: "Marie's plan, I need a ride out of here."

Double shifted into Peacock and one wild bandwagon ride up the stairs later Eliza was thrown, body bag and all, into the massive statue of Queen Lamia in the Cathedral. Marie came racing up the stairs and continued to support Double, having skeletons grapple Eliza and a few times massive horned skulls ram into her when she tried to take to the skies and escape. The chaos only grew as Big Band and Peacock joined the fray, followed swiftly by Painwheel who sent out a ping to let her know she was now Awake. Valentine rejoined the melee followed by Filia and Squiggly; their Parasites, Sampson and Leviathan, had a personal vendetta against Sekhmet.

Surrounded on so many sides Eliza turned into her Blood Monster form and stopped caring about hiding, lost in the rush of battle. Marie countered by summoning enough bones and skeletons to form a construct of Queen Lamia to match Eliza's inhuman form. Parasoul and her troops showed up at this point; once Big Band (who Awoke right after getting rescued from an all-out assault by Sekhmet by a body flicker/Hairball combo attack from Valentine and Filia) gave her a rundown of what was going on she quickly had her troops move to getting citizens out of the way, while having her heavy hitters and the sniper known only as Number 13 do their best to nullify the massive blood construct's assault.

When the sun rose over New Meridian the next day it was to a scene that seemed almost out of the rampage of Queen Nancy's rampage as the Skullgirl seven years prior. Buildings were demolished, bones were scattered everywhere and smoke filled the sky. In the ruins of Bastet's Den lay the shattered body of Sekhmet; Eliza's skin organs and blood were scattered about the area, with her microphone staff twisted into scrap nearby.

As Double took back the Skull Heart from Marie and, as a request from Marie instead of her original wish, resurrected Squiggly and

healed her of the damage, a Ping went out. Big Band, Painwheel and Marie all turned to Peacock and sent their reply Pings. Peacock looked over the area while she looked at her loop memories of all that had occurred.

"Damn it, why did I have to awaken so late this time! Missed getting to try a few things on that Jumbo Blood monster."

Unseen by everyone else, Annie looked on from several rooftops away. With Eliza dealt with she knew she now had a solid year to at least rest. She had negotiated her contracts this time that if the threat of the Skullgirl was ended, she could end the shows and find something else to do. Maybe Beowulf would like a "Former Actor" as a manager to get him back in the ring.

Eliza sat next to her bathing pool, wondering what had happened. "Strange, very strange." She was back where she had started two days before, sitting by her bathing pool contemplating how much to turn into blood and bathe in before planning that night's performance in her Club. Everything had been Déjà vu all the way to when she entered the Crypt. The Skullgirl not standing in a pile of bones and Theonite veins followed by the massive battle and what should have been her death, only to find herself by her baths again for the third time had her pausing to think.

"Well," she said, smirking as her eyes turned black with yellow irises, "This is new."

5.1 (con't) Drakohahn

[Skullgirls][Gundam Seed]

"Hey everyone! Meet the newest misfit of our happy family, Kira! He's a bit Loopy, but don't hold that against him," Patricia "Peacock" Watson declared as she entered the main room first.

Kira and Dr. Avian came in a few seconds later. The kind, if eccentric, doctor had gotten him something like a walker to help support him as he got used to his heavy body while still allowing him to move under his own power to deal with the stiffness. Once he was close enough to the gathered people, he was introduced to the rest of the people from Anti-Skullgirls Lab 8.

First there was Big Band, a startlingly tall man in a modified trench coat with instrument parts attached to his back and sides. Next was Ileum, a woman in a mask and modified patient's outfit whose limbs looked more like intestines than skinless muscle... there were also a pair of drills coming out of her shoulders. Hive and Leduc were introduced after Ileum, a pinkish-haired girl in a bee themed dress and a young blonde man with mechanical limbs respectively. Finally, there were kids here flocking around Ileum, looking like something out of a horror movie.

After introductions were out of the way, most everyone went back to doing whatever they had been previous to his introduction. However, Big Band stayed behind with Patricia.

"So, you're a looper like us? Sorry for your introduction to our universe," the much larger man said in condolence. "Surviving a near-death experience is never fun."

"Thank you, Mr. Birdland." Even after so many loops, Kira tended to be formal during initial meetings with someone new.

"Just call me Ben, or Big Band if you want," Ben 'Big Band' Birdland said as he lifted his face away from his breather for a moment. "It's been a long time since I've been called Mister."

"Yeah yeah, Band Camp. He hears ya. Let's talk about something more important," Patricia said impatiently. "Like the capabilities of that suit you was making."

"The prototype powered frame?" Kira replied. "It wasn't finished when the explosions happened and Dr. Avian said it had gone

missing afterwards." He took the time to try and stretch the stiffness out of his limbs. Due to the heaviness of them, he wasn't able to do much.

"Unfortunately, we know exactly where it disappeared to," Big Band stated. "Those explosions were only a diversion so the Medici Mafia could take it without interference."

"What?! Damn it!" Kira looked like he was barely restraining his fury. "They damaged the college, killed my friends and almost killed me to get their hands on an unfinished prototype?!"

"Well, it's not like we have to worry about actually facing it, cause we're loopers, but a heads up on what to watch out for would be nice," Patricia stated flippantly.

Kira took a deep breath. "Like I said, it's unfinished. I was responsible for programming the operating system to run the damn thing, which was only about 93% complete before this happened. It wasn't actually designed for fighting Skullgirls, but it would have been easily repurposed to do so. Once the exoframe was completed, it'd have allowed a man to lift a hundred times his normal limit at least and been equipped with hard points for carrying tools and such."

"Typical college project to do good in the world, twisted to only cause suffering," Big Band said with a shake of his head. "Sounds like the Medici alright. They mass-produce something like that, they could name their price on the black market."

"Oooo, sounds like it's going to be a blast to fight! I can't wait!" Peacock stated with unbridled glee.

"Well, you're going to have to. They'll most likely finish it with whatever personal touches they want before seeing about mass-production. We have time enough for Kira here to adjust to his Parasite and learn to fight with it."

That sounded agreeable to the young man the Medici family harmed in more ways than one. He wasn't one for revenge, but get his blood boiling and even his usual pacifistic nature wouldn't save a guy. The Medici were going down...HARD!

5.3 Cyberbeta

[Skullgirls][Tales from The Crypt]

Marie Awoke and stared at the person replacing Double as the piece of the Goddess...or God in this case guarding the Skull Heart.

"What's wrong little Ghoul? Don't have the Heart to make a Wish?"

As The Cryptkeeper cackled at his pun and started to deliver more Marie seriously considered if trying to eliminate him with something from her pocket, or making her normal wish and sucking him up with her vacuum cleaner; he was a corpse after all.

5.1 (con't) Drakohahn

[Skullgirls][Gundam Seed]

Several days had passed since Big Band informed Kira of what really happened that day. Kira's first priority was mastering his Parasite, which wasn't easy even for the Ultimate Coordinator. Well, in this world, he was technically a normal person so he didn't have his normal strength and durability. Most of the time he was awake went to moving his limbs as much as possible to exercise the muscles that supported the Parasite and work out the stiffness. Suddenly having your skin replaced with metal, albeit flexible, organic metal, wasn't something to just shrug off. He was actually amazed his body could handle the vastly increased load so well, but

then chalked it up to the Parasite doing more than just replace his skin.

Big Band encouraged him to slow down, since overworking his body in too short a time would be detrimental. That and speed isn't the be-all-end-all of a battle. He even used himself as an example, with his mechanical body being very slow in most cases but his body was durable enough that he can take the hits to get into the right position to strike his opponent. Kira could see his point, but the young man was used to fighting fast battles, so speed was a big component of his style. Still, if he had to adjust to being slower, then he would. For now, he just wanted to reach a more normal human speed.

Much to Kira's surprise, after about a week of adjusting to his new body, he found it much easier to move. While he was still very heavy, the stiffness was completely gone. So while he was still slower than normal, it wasn't because of lack of range of motion. Now, Kira changed his training...he was fighting the Anti-Skullgirl weapons. A rather big step, admittedly, but now that he could move properly, he wanted to see what his new body could really do.

Patricia insisted on going first against Kira. While her crazy cartoon antics put him off balance during the fight, Kira's organic metal skin proved a strong defense against most of her arsenal. However, for the young man, it was a failing stalemate as he wasn't able to get closer while she kept her distance with her cartoony projectiles and assistants. Not to mention, she had a short-range teleport ability for when he did get close to deal some damage. In fact, she had just disappeared into the hole in the floor now.

Reacting quickly, even if his heavy body slowed his actual turning down, he whipped his hand back to try and intercept Peacock. In doing so, he made his first real hit of the fight...and Peacock showed off more of her cartoony antics. The blow caused her head to spin around really fast for a few seconds before she deliberately brought her hands up and slammed them in place to stop it. He was sure if she actually had eyes in her head, they'd have been spinning around

in their sockets like old cartoons would. The expression on her face was most telling, a strange mix of shock and awe.

"I'm sorry! Were you hurt at all?" Kira immediately dropped out of combat mode after seeing what happened. While he hoped it was just her, he didn't want to think he could have killed someone so easily with a backhand like that. He was only going for a quick stun he could capitalize on, not outright murder his opponent.

"I'm fine, but wow. I've never had the opportunity to experience that." Then she returned to her normal manic grin. "Now I just need to learn how to projectile vomit and I'll be able to recreate the Exorcist!"

After that, she said she'd wait a bit before fighting him again. So, Big Band stepped up to see what the rookie was made of. Kira knew that this fight was going to be tough. His opponent had a lot of experience being slow and durable, on top of having larger mass than Kira did. Kira's main advantage was the fact that his mass was more compact than Big Band's was, as his pneumatic weaponry was hollow. This meant Kira put more mass into a smaller area of impact, even if he didn't have nearly as much as Ben did. However, he was also aware that the whole "size doesn't matter" belief is ignorant. Even a slight difference in mass can make the difference in a body to body fight and unfortunately, Ben Birdland's advantage there was huge.

Kira knew how to fight in his normal body. In fact, he had been learning every martial art in his universe he could find. Partly out of boredom and partly out of strengthening himself to shore up the holes in his skills. That's also why he's taken rigorous gun training with Natarle and other trained military people he knew. However, none of that mattered against these people made to fight the Skullgirls as he refused to pull out a gun in a fight like this, not that he thought it'd help even if he did, and his martial arts training was all about taking down normal sized humans, not mechanical behemoths like Ben was. Well, that was a lack he'll correct as soon as possible.

Most likely, Big Band was also sizing him up for this fight. Peacock sat off to one side, a bowl of popcorn on her lap. The silent stare-down stretched out for a few more seconds before the fight started. Big Band activated the musical devices on his back to bull rush Kira. Said young man jumped to one side to dodge the oncoming massive man. It didn't matter to the one-man band as he had gotten into close range.

What followed next left Kira really glad he had his Parasite now, since he was sure a normal person would have been utterly destroyed by the older Anti-Skullgirl Weapon on the first hit. As it was, the long string of instrument-based weapons were knocking him around like he was a rag doll. He attempted to dodge them, but not nearly fast enough as most of the attacks had enough speed and range themselves that he'd at least be clipped. Faster, he had to get faster!

Big Band then trapped him inside a giant bell, ringing it to stun the younger man. When he pulled the bell off, Kira was holding his head in his hands. While the new Parasite Host staggered from the punishing sound waves, the bigger man brought an arm out...A giant, instrument-based pneumatic arm. With the massive fist bearing down on him and his body still trying to shrug off the effects of that bell trap, he was sure the hit would knock him out. When his body moved out of the way on its own accord, Kira was rightly confused. Big Band merely smirked under his breather.

Recovering his senses, Kira looked down at his body and discovered flared protuberances along his arms, legs, chest, and back. They were largest on his back, reminding him of a Mobile Suit's thrusters. Did that mean, these things were comparable to vernier thrusters? He tested this, sending a mental command to the larger ones on his back and finding himself lifted off the ground. It'd take some getting used to, but Kira decided he was fine with this much.

"Finally got your Parasite adapting to you. That's good. Now, the true fight starts." Big Band took his fighting stance once more with Kira taking his own. This time, however, there wasn't any worry or

hesitation in his movement. Sure, it was because he suddenly got a way back into his comfort zone, but he could work on that later. For now, he wanted to see what his new body could really do.

5.4 Masterweaver

Information was a precious, powerful thing.

A bit of science here, a little promise there. The name of a wealthy barrister, or the location of an ancient artifact. Society was built on information-what people knew, and what people didn't know, and which people knew what. Money was potent, this was true, but she'd lived long enough to see the coins turn to bills turn to bones. She'd seen great families rise and fall-sometimes on her own whims-over the course of her long life. Nations built and shattered on a single truth, or a single lie.

Everyone *knew* Eliza was an affluent singer, everyone *knew* she was a philanthropist, everyone *knew* she relied on her two servants to protect her. And anyone who said otherwise, well, they'd have to search a damn good long while to find proof, and they'd have to do it without her noticing. She kept deep secrets. Dark secrets. Secrets that not even the gods knew-or at least, not those pathetic imitations that had called themselves gods. She'd kept them for a long while, long enough that she could easily divert those sniffing about, especially if they were touched by the Trinity. Not nearly so subtle as they had hoped.

And yet... the young Skullgirl had known.

Eliza took a thoughtful sip from her wineglass, which was filled with the same red substance her naked body now rested in. Time had gone back, obviously enough. First with her initial defeat of the bone golem and ruling over Canopy. Then, after that, an attempt to take the girl by surprise-countered swiftly and competently, though not exactly in a planned manner. There was a difference between

planned attacks, and prepared ones... subtle, perhaps, yet the chaos that preceded her death was coordinated on the fly.

Oh, yes, she had died. Hmm. Perhaps she should be more worried about that... but it wasn't the primary concern in her mind. Not with the way time had sent her back.

Not with the way the young Skullgirl had *known...*

She couldn't just ask. Or, rather, she could, but that would be bargaining from a position of weakness. Admitting powerlessness- and she might be powerless, yes, but to admit it was to submit. No, she would have to discover how the Skullgirl knew, how she had been prepared... perhaps she had been sent back in time as well? Most of her usual methods of coercion would be useless, then. The skullgirl could simply wait it out, or die and move onto the next timeline. But then again...

Perhaps it would be best not to confront her directly. The nurse that had been with her had contacted the ASG labs when the fight began, or at least that was what had seemed to happen. Even if not, the ASG Labs would probably be an easy way to keep tabs... provided, of course, she could access their files. Not difficult, but to do so without tipping her hand... Eliza could not be seen near them.

Then again...

"Horace, Albus, would you two be darlings and clear my schedule for the week?" She rose from the pool of blood, her dripping form warping and reforming. "I'm afraid a personal matter has come up."

"Of course, milady. We shall see to it momentarily."

"I'll get the limo ready."

"No need," she assured Albus, placing her glass on Horace's offered tray. "This is something that requires discretion, and your charming visages would unfortunately be a bit recognizable."

Albus grunted, but backed down. "Well... alright."

"We shall arrange the usual distractions, of course."

She nodded as she strode out, her form finally taking something so long forgotten.

Information was crucial. Eliza was a bronze-skinned human socialite with wealth and wealthy taste, and so could never be this dark-skinned feline feral dressed in ragged leather. And to be fair, it had been so long since Eliza last wore this form... or even needed it. She could find an ASG easily, and from there...

Well, from there, she could figure things out. She always did.

5.1 (con't) Drakohahn

[Skullgirls][Gundam Seed]

"So what's the problem here?" Patricia said while puffing away on one of the cigars she'd pull out of nowhere. Kira heard she did that in baseline too, so it wasn't from her subspace pocket. The young man dismissed it as it wasn't really important at the moment. It did mean he wouldn't be able to use the cigars he picked up in Rapture to barter with her, which was a shame.

"Just because he's capable of fighting on an even level with our baseline doesn't mean he'll join your Medici murder sprees." Big Band replied in a tone that spoke of just how often she did that.

"Why not? He has legitimate beef with them, just like I do."

That was Kira's current predicament. Peacock thought he was good enough for now and wanted to take the fight to the Medici Mafia. On the one hand, he didn't like to kill due to his general pacifistic beliefs and attitude. On the other hand, the Medici made it personal by

killing his friends and almost killing him to get their hands on the prototype powered frame they had been working on. This, on top of all their other atrocities Big Band and Peacock have informed him of.

With that in the front of his mind, he was considering just letting himself go along with Patricia's plan. There was a time and place for sheathing your sword... dealing with remorseless criminals was not one of those. Kira decided he'd just knock the mooks around on his way to the head honchos, while Peacock did her thing.

"Just killing people tangentially related to the guys responsible for the death of my friends and theft of my powered frame isn't me." Peacock frowned in disappointment, while Kira was sure Big Band had a smirk under his breather. "However, taking down the people in charge...I would happily oblige."

Patricia's grin returned while Ben just shook his head.

"Fine, we hit the Medici," the old cop turned Anti-Skullgirl Weapon said with his variation of a shrug. "Not really a workout, especially since they're small potatoes compared to the Skullgirl, but why not? I have some beef with them too."

5.5 Masterweaver

"...So. It is just us then."

"Yes."

Marie cleared her throat. "I'm not causing you discomfort, am I?"

"Well... maybe a little," Carol admitted. "But not... actively. It's just something that... is there, you know? There's a tugging feeling, and... there's a lot of trauma that is associated with you, even though you didn't cause any of it."

"Ah. Well, if it gets too intense, I can... wander around Canopy, I suppose."

"I appreciate the thought, but I think being alone would be worse. With you, I can... talk about this." Carol rubbed her scars. "And... Ben's not Awake."

"Patricia isn't either."

Carol blinked. "She's not?"

"It happens sometimes." Marie shrugged. "I know, she's the Anchor, but... I think the way our timeline is fractured affects that? Us specifically, I mean. It's possible she's in the timeline where Valentine is the one who defeats me... or something."

"Or we could have a stealth Anchor visiting." Carol shuddered. "I know I wouldn't blame them for not wanting to talk, our world is pretty horrible."

"True enough. Still. You and me, and all of Canopy." Marie steepled her fingers. "What shall we do this loop?"

"...I just want to be an ordinary girl, or as ordinary as I can be."

"The problem with that, of course, is the question of what qualifies as ordinary."

"I want... I can't go back to school," Carol admitted. "But... Maybe I can... talk about the latest book. Or movie."

"Are you fond of Annie?"

"The girl of the stars?" Carol shrugged. "Not for or against her. I thought you would be pretty against that series, though, being..."

"Well, yes and no. Patricia is a fan, so I endure it. And it's not horrible," Marie mused. "It's quite good for what it's trying to be. The anti-skullgirl angle is essentially my core quibble..."

5.1 (con't) Drakohahn

[Skullgirls][Gundam Seed]

Kira had to admit, this loop was actually kind of fun. Sure, he didn't really like fighting on principle, but this was kind of cathartic. Peacock started off the current operation, storming the local casino the Medici used as an HQ, by driving her 'Bandwagon' through the front door. Though he had no idea why she shouted "Republican Car! YEAH!" when she smashed her way in. He looked at Ben when that happened, who only shook his head.

After that, he and Big Band zipped in with their respective propulsion features and bowled over the guards and bouncers that appeared to take them down. Against the mechanical nature of Ben and his own organic metal skin, their guns were highly ineffective. Kira actually found it kind of pathetic that it was so easy. Even in his baseline, with how skilled he was as a pilot, he was still facing weaponry that would damage or even destroy his MS if they hit with them. Now, he was throwing around mafia thugs and there was nothing they could do about it.

Well, there was that Cerebella girl who showed up to stop them. She refused to listen when Kira asked why she was working for such bad people. So, he had to fight her. Thankfully, he wasn't distracted by any of the normal thugs as Big Band and Peacock dealt with them. He would have defeated her quickly, but the Living Weapon on her head, Vice Versa, was ridiculously strong. Still, he wasn't weak by any stretch of the imagination.

As he found out while training to use his Parasite's potential, he couldn't use his thrusters while wearing anything that covered them up, though he could retract them when he didn't need them. This left him with very little he could wear when he wanted to fight. So, he wore swim trunks and that was it. He was embarrassed to do so, but practicality was the more important issue. Peacock thought it'd be

funny if he just went without anything, but Big Band vetoed that suggestion.

Cerebella was very quick on her feet, even with those huge muscular arms that were part of her hat. Said arms apparently were also at least equal, if not greater, in strength to Big Band. However, unlike Ben, she was well within the size he had trained his martial arts skills to fight, though the extra arms on her head threw him off for a few moments. Dodge left, deflect a blow, dodge right, deflect again, another dodge right... Kira saw his opening.

He grabbed the muscular arm and pulled. Cerebella stumbled forward and her hat came off. Kira threw the Living Weapon behind him into the wreckage of the casino's slot machines. Without Vice Versa's big arms to keep him at a distance, Cerebella found herself outmatched by the ASG Weapon before her. She tried to use her higher agility and acrobatic skill to keep away from her foe until she could get around him to her weapon, but his thrusters allowed him to cut her off at each turn. Finally, he managed to catch her by a leg and used that to whip her around before slamming her into the ground hard. That was the last straw; she fainted.

By that time, Big Band and Peacock had already dealt with the remaining goons. So, now it was on to the boss in charge of this operation. However, they found the higher floors were empty of everything. Only outlines remained of where furniture and pictures used to be. It seemed like they had been forewarned somehow and had moved everything days ago. But that couldn't be. How could they have known?

5.6 Masterweaver

Eliza hadn't expected to find a hint so quickly, or so blatantly.

She'd assumed there would be some form of tracking on the skullgirl, yes, even if only in potentia. A plan to determine where the

skull heart was, where the new bearer would be. Detectives, spies, a network she could tap into herself-she had the advantage of already knowing, to some degree, who the skullgirl was, she only needed the network to figure out the details.

It had been all of two minutes after her arrival, however, that she had spotted the skullgirl herself.

The maid had been disguised, of course. Her exposed ribs were hidden, her tell-tale eyes flickering behind a glimmer of some illusion spell. She seemed like an ordinary girl, one Eliza could have easily missed if she didn't already know what she looked like. For a brief moment, the old theon considered that maybe-just maybe-the skullgirl could track her. Given what she knew of the skull heart's origin, it wouldn't be unlikely. She didn't dismiss the idea, but it was quickly supplanted by the possibility that the skullgirl was here to destroy the ASG labs.

It came as a surprise when one of the ASG weapons walked out, spotted the girl, and tackled her in a flexible-armed hug.

Eliza tilted her ears... how long had it been since she had a feral's ears in one of her forms? A while, perhaps, but nevertheless she managed to catch snips of the conversation from the two.

"...Yu-Wan's place? It's always pretty homey."

"Homey is certainly one word for it..."

"Ah, come on Marie! I'm in the mood for seafood!"

"Oh very well, I suppose. Anything interesting happening with you?"

"Loop before last I was on the Marathon-you know, the big ship with the crazy computer and the aliens..."

Eliza narrowed her eyes as they walked down the road. After a moment, she pushed herself off the wall. "Yu-Wan..." Hmm. Sounded

Dagonian. Little Innsmouth, maybe?

That nonsense about aliens and computers was certainly interesting, but more interesting was the fact that the ASG weapon knew the Skullgirl. Knew her, and liked her. It was almost as if they'd been expecting to meet.

How deeply did this conspiracy run?

And how, she wondered, had it escaped her notice?

5.1 (con't) Drakohahn

[Skullgirls][Gundam Seed]

Kira, Patricia, and Ben were just standing around in the emptied room, wondering what to do next.

"Well, I can't say I've seen this variant before," Peacock declared after a few quiet moments. This was the first time Kira had seen her display actual confusion.

"So, now what?" he asked. "We don't have a clue we can use to find where they went."

"Not quite. There's always some clue, kids."

Kira and Patricia looked up at the imposing figure of Big Band.

"All this furniture and finery didn't just disappear into thin air. Considering everything out of the public eye has been taken away, it would have taken a lot of time and effort to haul it all away... especially since no one downstairs acted like anything was different. So, they must have used a backdoor or the like to hide the move." It was sometimes difficult to remember that the veteran ASG Weapon

had originally been a street cop who inspected crime scenes and the like.

"So what?" Peacock huffed. "All those goons were toasted and the acrobatic bimbo's probably long gone by now."

"That may be. However, of all the places we looked, did we see anything that would lead to an exit other than the front door?" he asked somewhat rhetorically.

After a moment's thought, they concluded that indeed, they had not.

"So, there's a possible secret door somewhere in all of these empty rooms?" Kira asked the former cop.

"No possibly about it," Ben stated with his variation of a shrug. "In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if there was an elevator big enough to hold large loads."

"I'd complain about this sudden and unexpectedly smart move, but this is just an interesting new challenge," Peacock said with shrug.

Kira wondered just how often a big variant loop came by if this kind of thing was unusual to his fellow loopers. "So, we just have to find a place where a hidden entrance would most likely be and bust it open?" The young man asked.

Peacock grinned at him. "Kira, I like the way you think. You heard him, gang! Let's wreck the place!"

With that declaration, her cartoony imaginary friends appeared and started running around tearing holes in the walls. About a minute later, Tommy Ten-Tons shouted, "Boss, I found it!"

Indeed, there was an elevator large enough that it could probably hold and support a pair of African bull elephants.

After a moment, the three ASG Weapons looked at each other before stepping on. It was time to see where this ride took them.

Riding it down to the lowest possible floor, they found themselves in a mostly empty loading area standing on an elevated platform for loading and unloading big trailers and trucks. There were a pair of figures standing in the middle of the area, perfect for fighting in.

"This sucks," a male voice said. "There's not a beautiful woman among the lot. I guess that means no new trophies today."

"Why do you even want trophies?! I'm the only woman you need!" a female voice replied with lots of jealousy in her tone.

The ASG trio looked at the pair. The man wore a mostly red suit with some black and white checker patterns on his legs and chest with a matching feathered hat, while the woman had no arms and looked like a cross between a puppet and a violin.

Patricia frowned with an annoyed glare at the two facing them down. "That's just great. Taliesin and his Remote Parasite, Muse. These fuckers are Medici leg breakers like Cerebella, that girl with the muscular cap you beat, Kira. He also has the job of hunting down any of his 'friends' who break contract with the Medici." Her face got vicious. "Not to mention his use of the Medici slave trade to collect any woman he considers beautiful with his power to turn people into instruments."

Considering how angry she was getting, Kira and Big Band suspected that he had tried to take her or Marie as an instrument at least once during Peacock's time looping.

Kira put a hand on her shoulder. "Have at him. I'll even help if you want."

She grinned with that viciousness still intact. "Thanks for the offer, but this waste of life is on my shit list. There won't be much of him left when I'm through."

With a bellow of rage, she lept down from the platform and rushed the duo. The pair was immediately put on the defensive, trying to

push back the one girl tide and failing miserably. While they were obviously experienced and fighting with a two on one advantage, Peacock had been looping for a long time and wasn't in the mood to hold back. Mere seconds later, a massive explosion echoed the mostly empty loading area and the duo fell. However, the guy wasn't completely dead yet... after all, he could probably tell them what they wanted to know, the location of his boss.

"Tell me where your boss is!" An angry Peacock was a terrifying sight to behold. Kira made a mental note to try and avoid getting on her bad side.

"*hack* H... he's at the te-tempor... ary HQ... *cough* Do-n't know... exact loca-tion. I-i-it's in the... red... light... district."

And then he fell unconscious. Kira could tell that Taliesin's wounds were fatal, and his "hobby" disinclined him from giving the mercenary medical treatment.

"Well, we have a clue at least." Peacock huffed as her companions joined her. "Wonder why it's so roundabout this loop."

"Perhaps because this loop, the River King Casino, and the Medici Tower are the same location? Can't say that happens too often," Ben commented with a shrug. "Anyway, since we have a vague location to go on, let's get to looking."

5.7 DrTempo

Peacock Awoke to find herself trying to cook; apparently, Marie was coming over to have dinner. The door rang, and Peacock answered.

"Heya, Marie!"

Marie was grumbling a little. "Well, Peacock, I made it. In spite of your directions."

Peacock chuckled. "Ah, Marie, I hope you're ready for an unforgettable luncheon!"

Marie frowned. "Eh."

Peacock went to check on her cooking, and to her shock, smoke was coming out of the stove. "Egads! My roast is ruined!"

Suddenly, Peacock noticed a nearby fast food restaurant was nearby. She chuckled.

"But what if... I were to purchase fast food and disguise it as my own food? Oh, how delightfully devilish, Peacock!"

But before Peacock could open the window, Marie entered the room, and facepalmed. "Looks like we're having steamed hams for dinner, Peacock."

At that moment, Peacock realized just what had happened, and laughed.

"I can't believe we ended up doing that old joke! Too bad ya had to ruin it, Marie!"

Marie sighed. "I thought you were doing it on purpose, Peacock."

"Nope! Not this time! Now, let's get out of here before my attempt at using Principal Skinner's cookbook causes mayhem!"

A few minutes later, everyone else ran out of the lab as, true enough, mayhem ensued.

5.1 (con't) Drakohahn

[Skullgirls][Gundam Seed]

Kira didn't really like being in this place. Red Light Districts were something he avoided at least on principle. Not to mention Flay and Lacus never approved of such places. Still, if he and his current friends in the ASG Weapons had to look through here to find the HQ, then so be it. But that didn't help them actually find the darn thing. And no, they weren't going along with Peacock's plan to just level the whole place until they find what they're looking for.

So, did they have to check every building to see which had the most Medici in it to figure out which is the HQ? Nope, because Peacock and Big Band happened to come across Riccardo, a Medici thug they had experience with... though Patricia only just recalled the face of a man she'd murdered countless times over her looping. Fortunately, Big Band was the one to interrogate the guy... for a certain value of fortune. By the time Ben Birdland was finished with him, Riccardo needed new pants and a shower. Patricia was very impressed as she watched every second.

Well, they had their destination, but Kira learned that it was unexpected for his friends... once again. The name of the nightclub they had to raid was called the Bastet's Den, owned and run by Eliza. When he asked, the native loopers told him about her, an ancient Parasite host who drank blood to retain her youth and beauty... that and she was a huge hedonist with something of a god complex. She played herself off as something of an altruist with a charity blood drive, but that was just a facade so she could keep the blood for herself. In other words, someone who Kira would not show mercy to.

After bouncing the bouncers, they'd find themselves in the main lounge.

"So Ben, you're sure you can trust the information that guy gave?" Kira asked, uncertain about information given under threat of force.

Eliza was on the stage, singing to her crowd... and abruptly cut off upon noticing her newest arrivals. This caused the patrons to turn

and stare at what drew her attention away from singing. They all stood up, pulling out various guns.

"Pretty sure," came the deadpan reply.

Of course, against the three ASG Weapons, they were as useful as throwing wet toilet paper. When the bullets stopped flying, the trio split up to plow through the mafia thugs.

As bodies started flying around, Eliza dropped her act and attacked the closest ASG Weapon. This turned out to be Big Band. He grunted from the impact, but threw her off the next moment. Peacock saw this happen and frowned; she had wanted to fight Eliza, not deal with crowd control again. Then she went back to fulfilling her Medici murder promise to Marie. Kira was fine dealing with the grunts, doing his best to hold his strength and weight back so he wasn't just punching through their bodies. He really hated to fight brutally like that.

Still, since dealing with the normal thugs wasn't a big deal with the pair of loopers, they tried to pay more attention to the fight between the veteran of Lab 8 and the narcissistic vampire wannabe. Kira was left somewhat in awe, only returning to his senses and continuing to fight the thugs because a couple of them swung at him with steel pipes. The old cop may have had a big slow body, but during a battle, his attacks flowed together like a song only Ben Birdland could hear. The bloodsucker was a good fighter, there was no arguing that, but just like Taliesin facing Peacock, she was vastly outclassed and only survived as long as she did through fighting defensively.

She used her own blood for fighting, using it to extend her range as well as making things to attack with. While this gave her more range and mobility, Big Band was able to power through most of it without flinching to deliver his own blows. Her style had experience from her long life, but she never fought like the veteran of two Skullgirls had to. She preferred her life of decadence over keeping her fighting skills sharp, as her narcissistic god complex made her assume she

couldn't be beaten anyway. In the end, the One Man Band broke her beyond her ability to recover.

Also around this time, the thugs stopped flowing in... well, wasn't that convenient. Deciding not to question it, Kira approached Ben while Peacock debated with herself and her gang if they should go over and finish off the Medici thugs Kira didn't. They eventually determined that they wouldn't, if only because there was no fun in killing an unconscious target. Ignoring her, the other two ASG Weapons talked.

"Now that we've dealt with the welcoming committee, where is the head honcho?" the younger man asked as he looked around.

"Since this building isn't tall like the normal HQ, that means he'd have to be in the other direction," Big Band stated as he looked down at the floor.

Kira got the meaning. "Since we can't go up, then we go down," the non-native looper declared.

Peacock perked up as she heard that. "Oh oh oh! Let me, let me!"

Kira and Big Band looked over at the excited girl ASG Weapon. They both had a sense of dread creep over them as she held up a hand and caused it to form into a drill...somehow.

"Mine is the drill that will pierce the Medici! PEACOCK...DRILL...BREAKERRRRRRRRRR!" She leaped into the air and brought her new hand drill down on the floor, boring through it like a hot knife through butter... and she didn't stop at the floor immediately below it... or the one after that...

How far down did this place go? Well, at least they didn't have to search for a hidden entrance again.

5.8 Masterweaver

It was easy enough to make her way to Little Innsmouth before the girls arrived. Easier still to find Yu-Wan's place-a community leader, of a sort. Every slum had one, the informal mediator, and like most he doubled as a provider to those around him-a restaurant owner, where jobs and food could both be found. Eliza played the part of the shy new feral, just moved in from the country wouldn't you know, could she have a menu and, and maybe a seat? Not too poor, she didn't want the attention of those who would offer to help, not too desperate, just... poking around.

Her meal arrived just as her prey entered. She nodded to the dagonian who brought her meal-there was no need to appear impolite, after all-and started picking at the food with her fork. Her ears twitched toward the pair as they placed their order with the chef-a single dish, but a large and varied one. Shared between 'friends...'

"So like I was sayin', after I cleaned up the gore I realized I hadn't asked for their, you know, password thing. So there I was, on a starship falling into a star, used up most of my weapons. And then I remembered the bananas."

The skullgirl let out a hum of amused resignment. "I do believe I see where this is going."

"Yep, I set the bananas on fire."

"...Okay, that was not where I expected that to go."

"Fire-suppression, Marie! Big on spaceships. Opened the vents, crawled through to the escape pods, and everything was hunky dory."

"That... okay, but why the bananas?"

"What, was I supposed to set my gun on fire?"

"I thought you would use the bananas to gunk up the circuitry!"

Eliza took a bite of her meal and savored it, shutting her eyes. There was, after all, no exact science to eavesdropping, no way to encourage the information you wanted. Torture was more useful, so long as you didn't lead the victim, but for that to work you had to make the victim feel trapped, defenseless... at your mercy. She simply didn't have the time to invest, at least at the moment. No, listening to the idle chatter of the Skullgirl and her companion it was, for the moment.

"So toots, how's the crazy broken god tree been treating you?"

Or she could luck out. That was also a possibility.

"Oh, standard fare for the loops," the skullgirl replied. "You know the drill, kill Double, Valentine, Brain Drain, get Carol to Ben, then go to town on the Medici." She tapped her fingers together. "I mean... there were a few loops without you, though."

"Yeah, still don't get how that works. I mean, if I'm the Anchor for this reality, and every loop needs an Anchor to run..."

"...then either we're getting more than our fair share of stealth Anchors or something's wrong with our loop."

"I'll tell you what's wrong with our loop, a bitch murdered our goddesses and the remnants decided to screw everyone over in revenge."

"Yes, but that's history. Not cosmology." The skullgirl shrugged helplessly. "I don't know. Maybe if we knew who our administrator was..."

"Like they'd even talk to us. Too busy chasing down glitches and bugs across the multiverse."

It felt like a conversation between friends, Eliza mused. Something they both knew and were talking about just to talk about it. Crazy broken god tree... anchors, loops, administrators. A scenario, and not a pleasant one, was forming in her head.

"Seriously though. Any fused loops, weird variants...?"

"Mmm... I had an interesting conversation with Lara Croft. We compared some notes on ancient cultures." The skullgirl produced, from thin air, some sort of tablet. "She had a lot of commentary on Eliza."

The trick was not to jolt. Eliza, in her current form, was just a humble customer. She focused on her fish, even as the words of the pair continued to filter in.

"Really?"

"Lara was interested in the egyptian dieties Eliza chose *not* to invoke. Apep, Hathor, Nephthys..."

"Yeah, toots, don't know who those are."

"Apep is a giant snake that wants to destroy everything. Hathor is the goddess of motherhood, drink, music. Nephthys is a... she's the keeper of temples, I believe."

"So, wha'chur sayin' is... what? Eliza doesn't like snakes?"

"She doesn't venerate Apep, despite being one of the most destructive people in our baseline. Hathor... well, some myths have Sekhmet as Hathor, but gone crazy and only being calmed by giving her lots of drink. Nephthys does have close associations with Anubis and Isis, and we know that she knows about them..." The skullgirl shrugged. "Basically, Lara thinks that Eliza essentially considers herself to *be* the egyptian pantheon, to some degree. Or perhaps their high priestess."

"So it ain't just an act." The other girl took a puff of a cigar that Eliza knew hadn't been in her hands a moment ago. "Right, so... don't think this changes anything."

"No," the skullgirl agreed, vanishing the tablet. "Still... know thy enemy."

Know thy enemy indeed, Eliza mused. Access to other worlds. Loops, repeats in time, anchored by specific people chosen by administrators. A crazy broken god tree... And they were asking each other about what happened. As though they hadn't seen each other. So... perhaps not entirely in control, then.

It would be best, she concluded, to avoid these two until she herself ended up in one of these other worlds.

"Gotta make sure Big Band and Carol know about this," the girl mused.

And those two. Whoever they were.

"You want to take her on?"

"What, Eliza?" The skullgirl shook her head. "She is a horrible person, yes, but she's in a resting state. If I provoke her, she'll go full aggressive mode. Let her have her comforts, for the moment. Best not to get her involved."

Ah. That was something. They didn't want to expend effort on her, unless she made herself a problem.

"...Guess you got a point. Gotta get somethin' special if we want to deal with her. Like one of those space age ray gun things."

"I was thinking more along the lines of a total entropy spell."

Or until they were ready. Still... that gave her some time.

Eliza finished her fish and left a small, but substantial tip for the waitress. It had been a profitable afternoon. Now she just needed to bide her time... something, it seemed, she would have plenty of.

5.1 (con't) Drakohahn

[Skullgirls][Gundam Seed]

Big Band dropped down the hole after Peacock, Kira riding on his shoulder. Eventually, he stopped at the bottom floor, which also had a hole in it, but didn't have any light coming out of it like the other holes. As they landed, the Medici thugs woke up from their apparently stunned state of seeing someone with a large drill for a hand burrow past them and attack the pair.

Yeah, they didn't stand a chance.

After some time of knocking the mafia members around, a heavy and distinctive thudding noise reached Kira and Big Band's ears. They looked around for a moment, since they couldn't immediately tell where the sound was coming from. As it got closer, and thus more distinct, they stared at each other as realization set in for both of them.

A door at the far end of the room was blown open and revealed a sight both familiar and unknown to Kira. Immediately, he recognized it as the prototype powered frame he and his friends were working on, but he also spotted the differences too.

It was a full body armored suit with a mostly boxy frame, though more complete than he last saw it with a chest plate and face covering. The arms were cylindrical with a bulkier section near the elbows for dealing with weight pressure. That was as far the familiarity went, as it was overhauled for combat, though it was obvious to Kira's trained eyes that the people who worked on the suit weren't nearly as skilled or knowledgeable of what they were doing

as his friends were. The normal hands had been replaced by fists with hardened metal spikes on the fingers and a custom ring of guns braced against the bulky arm parts. More threatening was a tube over each shoulder that connected directly to a massive backpack via covered ammo belts. Finally, there was a high caliber assault rifle mounted on custom holsters for each leg.

Overall, it seemed threatening and could do a lot of damage judging by the weaponry, but it also looked like it was very slapdash and amateurish. Like they only had enough understanding to make it work, but not how to properly balance the design. This definitely screamed of compensating for something as well. However, unlike the small arms the ordinary mooks had carried, this looked like military grade stuff and thus could likely hurt the One Man Band and the Parasite user.

After this moment of analysis, the man behind the armored plating opened fire with the arm mounted guns. Kira immediately dodged right using his thrusters, while Big Band boosted left. At this time, what remaining Medici mooks that still retained consciousness decided they didn't want to be in the line of fire and ran for it. Some of them weren't lucky enough as the stolen armor turned to fire at the younger ASG Weapon and got riddled with anti-material rounds. Kira was shocked by such blatant disregard for the lives of his opponent's comrades. Thankfully, it wasn't just him fighting as Big Band slammed a giant fist into the distracted backside of his stolen powered frame.

Despite the immense power of the blow, the armored suit was only knocked a bit off balance. As the guy compensated to straighten out again, he made an impressive leap away from the much taller cyborg. When he landed, he switched tactics from firing the guns to shooting RPGs from the tubes on his shoulders. Again, Kira was left horrified by the man's lack of regard for the lives of his fellows as the Medici members he and Big Band had knocked out were now being blown to bits from his missed shots. The horror and building rage was subsumed as another, very familiar sensation took hold.

Kira was very familiar with this state of mind, his activated SEED Factor-the Superior Evolution Element Destined Factor, a controversial and still unproven theory in the Cosmic Era regarding the continuation of Humanity's evolution. As the young Coordinator has experienced, activating his SEED allowed increased physical and mental ability, such as faster reflexes and increased informational processing. However, Andrew Waltfeld, a general from his baseline, compared the state to the Berserkers, who were feared on the battlefield for their rage... but while Kira had been terrified of the change initially, he found it was actually the opposite of those ancient warriors. SEED Mode gave him increased control over his mind and body instead of decreasing it. Still, he was only able to initially access this ability in battle while tensions were high and survival became paramount.

With the sudden calm that forced the distracting emotions down, Kira began plotting out exactly how to counter and defeat the armored foe in front of him. Even as he started into motion, he took control of his Parasite and caused it to once more adapt to his current need. He felt the thrusters on his back start to expand and mutate until they were a reasonable facsimile of his Strike Gundam's Aile Striker Pack, complete with a pair of handles sticking out near his shoulders. As he moved, Kira reached back and grabbed them; with almost unnatural ease and grace, he pulled them free and into a crossed formation in front of him as the replica of his Gundam's beam sabers sprouted into thin double edged blades about three and a half feet long.

The mutated thrusters activated and pushed him forward, even as the armored form loosed more rockets at the Parasite host. With the explosives heading towards him, Kira's reflexes took over and caused him to swipe at them with his blades. Said RPGs fell to the ground as useless pieces of scrap as he passed, causing the armored form to revert back to using his guns. Unimpressed, the swordsman rapidly deflected the incoming fire with his blades. Once he was close enough, the stolen armor stopped firing and attempted to go at it with the hardened spikes on his fists. However, due to its

overall weight and unrefined controls, the machine was too slow for the oncoming Parasite user.

The blades flashed and the metal was cut away from its pilot as the weapons based on the Armor Schneider combat knife technology of his Strike Gundam. That is to say, the swords he created from his Parasite were vibroblades and thus had greatly increased cutting power. From his memories of the powered frame and his SEED Mode, Kira effortlessly sliced the armor to pieces while still leaving the pilot unharmed. Despite the death of his friends and his desire for payback, he didn't want to kill the man if he was just the pilot and not actually related to the events that led to it being stolen. Still, it wouldn't be pleasant for the man inside as his vibrating blades created sparks as they cut... Painful, but survivable.

As Kira found a now very frightened man stuck in the scrap of his stolen powered frame, his mind became aware of another battle taking place on the other side of the room while his SEED Factor deactivated. There was Big Band, currently fighting against a very fancy dressed woman with a black veil over her face... and her right arm had been replaced by some kind of giant gun. He couldn't tell if it was a grenade launcher or some massive shotgun. Well, whatever the case, Big Band seemed like he was taking care of it just fine. In the meantime, he had some interrogation to do.

5.9 Masterweaver

Carol would be the first to admit she had serious issues. After everything she'd been through, it would be impossible *not* to. Trauma, trust, that strange distance from others...

...body image...

She could, and did, carry around more ordinary clothes in her subspace pocket. Buer Drive was easily, if painfully, removable. The nails... well, she could cover her shoulders and hips, and even if they

were seen Canopy was mixed enough to barely cause a second glance.

The scars on her face, though. The red and black eyes. The black veins and scratches across her flesh...

She shuddered, closing her eyes. "No. Positive, think, positive. You..." Her eyes opened and she looked in the mirror again. "You're... fit. And... and you're not missing any limbs, and..."

Her voice trailed off.

After a moment, Carol looked away from the mirror and curled up in a corner. "This is just one bad day. That's all it is. One bad day. Sure I'm... hideous, but... but I'm free-"

-the metal screeched as her blades cut through, red splashing everywhere-

"Breathe in... breathe out. Breathe in... breathe out." Carol looked at her hands. "Okay. You're okay, Carol. I'm okay. I can..."

She glanced around.

"...books. There are books... I can, read a book." A sort of laugh escaped her lips. "I'd have to go out, to the library... and register for a card... But I can read a book. A nice book, about unicorns. Yeah."

Her hands trembled.

"...Damn it." With a sigh, she forced herself up, walking out of the bathroom. "This is going to be another indoor day."

Carol flopped onto the couch. As an afterthought, she pulled a blanket over her body.

"Today is a bad day," she mumbled.

For a moment she was quiet.

"...Tomorrow... might not be. Yeah."

5.1 (con't) Drakohahn

[Skullgirls][Gundam Seed]

Big Band's battle with the veiled cyborg woman did not last much longer as Kira finished his interrogation of the thug formerly wearing armor he and his friends had so painstakingly worked at before their death. After knocking the guy out once he was done spilling what he knew, the Parasite host turned to stare at the mess of metal plates and circuits that was the remains of the armor. Since it wasn't all that different from the baseline build, he could remake it as much as he wanted, but due to his in-loop memories, he doubted he'd work on it anytime soon. Having something associated with the death of your friends could do that.

The woman Big Band identified as Black Dahlia during their battle collapsed onto the ground after taking one last punch from the former cop. However, before she fell to sweet oblivion, she taunted the pair by saying that while the Medici's have been decimated by their antics this day, the family head had already escaped... and that her informants inside the ASG labs had already dealt with Lab 8. Kira was visibly stunned at the revelation, while Big Band only sighed.

"Of course the Lab was attacked while the three of us were away. Apparently that's not going to change even in a variant fused loop." The younger ASG Weapon looked at him with surprise and confusion. "Sorry, we had been more focused on getting you trained than telling you of the events to come. That said, it's rare when there's more than just damage to the labs computers and such. Generally, the only casualty is Dr. Avian... and maybe I've become too used to the times I can't save him."

"That's an unnerving thought," Kira responded. "How often do we have to go through our baseline loops before we can shrug off even

the most horrid things that happen inside them?"

Before Big Band could reply, a cartoony hand popped out of the hole Peacock drilled earlier and grabbed onto the edge of the hole. Peacock pulled herself up, covered in dirt and and looking a bit disoriented. There was also a large sack in her other hand... it was far bigger than she was. Kira was momentarily baffled-how had she carried it up while she was climbing?

"Hey guys," she started cheerfully before noticing the mayhem that their battles caused. "Whoa, what'd I miss?"

"Nothing important," Big Band stated somewhat sarcastically. "What's in the bag?"

"I hit paydirt down there!" Patricia whooped with a laugh. Setting the sack on the ground, she showed off its contents... a metric crapton of gemstones. Ben Birdland sighed and Kira looked confused, as they were all apparently precut in various... styles unless she also took her time to do that as well. Patricia noticed the reactions. "What?"

"Did they come out of the ground like that?" Big Band asked.

"Yeah...why do you ask?" Patricia questioned innocently. Despite her homicidal tendencies, her cartoony reality warping and her time spent as a looper, she was still a young girl without much of a normal education. Ben Birdland knew from experience that Patricia and homework did not mix without something exploding along the way.

"Because gems and ores aren't supposed to come out of the ground already processed," Kira answered as he picked up and inspect the various crystals. "Especially quality ones like these, not a single flaw among them. Normally, they need cleaning up, refinement, cutting and polishing."

"Well, that just saves me time then," Peacock answered flippantly. Why should she care if she broke the normal laws of reality? If it worked, then what was the problem?

Ben and Kira just mentally threw up their hands and let it go.

Big Band informed her that the mafia don had escaped and that the lab had been attacked just like in baseline. That caused her to stand straight up with an angry frown when she had been in the middle of picking up her sack. And there was that side to her, the serious and vicious side that came out when people she cared about were harmed.

She let the sack lay there as she turned to leave. "You guys can split those things for all I care. Right now, I just want to break those traitors in half with my bare hands." With that declaration, she ran off.

Big Band walked towards the hole in the floor, since it was right under the hole in the ceilings above it. "I have no interest in petty sparkles like those. You can have them. Either way, we should be going too. There's still some unfinished business this loop." In the process of talking, he turned his legs into a series of large rocket thrusters.

Kira quickly stashed the bag in his pocket; he wasn't really interested in jewels himself, but he didn't want to waste them either. Still, the light-hearted mood that had been there was gone now as Kira climbed onto the larger guy's shoulders.

It was time to go confront the Skullgirl.

5.10 Masterweaver

[Skullgirls][GAoBaM]

"How much do you know?"

Eliza glanced up from her book, giving the speaker a polite smile. "I know a lot of things, young lady. Might I ask your name?"

"Mandy."

She took in the pink shirt, blond hair, and sullen frown of the child. "Ah. From the latin *amanda* , I believe. 'Worthy of love.' As I said, I know many things."

"But not enough," the girl replied, crossing her arms. "I could tell Marie you're looping, you know."

"Marie?" Eliza asked innocently.

"The skullgirl. Cut the act, Eliza, it's not going to work with me."

Eliza turned a page of her book. "I don't believe I understand. What exactly are you accusing me of, young lady?"

Mandy rolled her eyes. "You're Eliza, from Canopy and the Skullgirls loop, and you're stealth looping. And if you'd landed in almost any other loop you'd have been fine, but you ended up in the home loop of an MLE, which unfortunately means I need to get you up to snuff before Billy runs into you, otherwise you'll probably end up insane and become a menace to the multiverse yourself."

"Quite the imagination you have-"

Mandy slammed her hand on the table. "Em. El. Ee. Malicious Looping Entity. An individual so profoundly destructive, be it through malevolence, madness, or sheer stupidity, that they can and do cause damage to existence. In a multiverse with planet-destroying battlestations, star-snuffing magic, galactic-scale gods of chaos, and even YOU, there are a total of five who have earned that label. And one of them is a seemingly ordinary little boy who, at this very moment, is playing with the *actual grim reaper* ten blocks away." She jabbed a finger at the woman. "You want to play this game of 'let's pretend I'm totally innocent and harmless,' fine, I'll keep your secret. But we are not going to end this loop without you having a basic education on *what not to do."*

Eliza quirked an eyebrow.

After a moment, she put the book down on the table. "How exactly did you figure me out, young lady?"

"You went to the library for a map."

"...That's it?"

Mandy didn't quite smile, but there was a hint of amusement in her eyes. "This is the internet age. Most people would have gone online for a search engine. You, instead of checking your loop memories, decided to check out an atlas. That put you down as a new looper from a pre-digital tech universe. You did drive a car, though, so you couldn't have been pre-industrial despite your blatant preference for egyptian aesthetic. Narrowing it down from there was easy, especially since you used the same damn alias. And then you decided to check out books on norse mythology and temporal mechanics... it couldn't have been more obvious."

"This all assumes, of course, that you have access to the library check out records."

Mandy examined her fingernails idly. "Convincing the librarians to let me look things over is not that difficult."

"Hmmm." Eliza folded her hands. "You are certainly an interesting young lady, miss Mandy. I suppose I could listen to your... story, a little more."

Mandy looked right back at her. "Good. Because you didn't really have a choice."

5.1 (con't) Drakohahn

[Skullgirls][Gundam Seed]

With all the Medici thugs having either been dealt with or fled the battle, the loopers headed towards the Grand Cathedral where they intended to find the last fights of the Loop. Along the way, Ben and Patricia talked about the foes they'd be facing. One, the traitor responsible for the attack on Lab 8, wasn't a Looper and thus would go down very easily, while the other was a Loop Aware... thing... that acted as a nun for the Trinity. With the confused and curious look Kira gave him, Ben explained about how the Trinity created the Skullheart that was responsible for the creation of Skullgirls and how they wanted to destroy the world for some reason. Well, it probably extended beyond just this world, since they were actual deities, but good luck figuring them out.

Finally, there was the current Skullgirl herself, Marie. Patricia's old friend who was also a Looper, but wasn't awake this loop. Peacock told Kira in no uncertain terms that she wanted to take her down alone, as she wouldn't forgive anyone else for harming her friend. Kira was a bit blindsided by this, but shrugged it off a moment later. If she wanted to end her friend's misery personally, it was her choice.

Eventually, they reached the Grand Cathedral. Kira spent a couple moments staring up at the impressive sight; he had a really bad feeling about this place. When he noticed that his companions hadn't stopped when he had, Kira chased after them. As he entered, he noticed the interior and its solemn atmosphere. If he wasn't getting such a nasty feeling about this place, he would have stopped to appreciate the architecture and stained glass windows.

When he came astride of his friends, he noticed two figures staring them down. One looked like a sexified nurse with her shirt open to expose cleavage and a very short skirt. She also wore a surgeon's mask and carried a bone saw in the small of her back. The other... was a nun. Most likely, this was that Double thing he was told about. She had her eyes closed and a blank look on her face. However, even as he watched her, that horrid feeling increased. What was going on here?

"So, you have finally arrived," the nun stated as her eyes opened to reveal pure red eyes with nothing else in them. "I take it that nothing more needs to be said?"

When the trio across from her and the nurse nodded, Double's body rippled. While Peacock and Big Band were long used to seeing her shapeshifting abilities, Kira had to run through some mental exercises to avoid vomiting. By the time her body stopped raping the laws of physics to change shape, she now looked like a darker colored version of him. Kira had to blink a bit to process what he was seeing. The hair was an almost black shade of brown and the eyes were a very dark violet, but there was no doubt that she was mimicking him. However, what threw him off the most was the violent grin on the face.

As if on some unspoken signal, the nurse charged towards Big Band and Peacock. However, Kira wasn't able to watch that fight as his apparent doppelganger charged him in the same moment. He braced himself and met the charge head-on. It pushed him back a bit, but he countered by grappling its arms and slamming it into the nearby pews. As it recovered, he formed his Aile imitation and use the increased thrust for his own charge, combining it with the collapsible swords that he had used on the stolen armored frame.

Much to his surprise, he was countered by a pair of those exact same swords now being wielded by his opponent. Sparks flew from the clash of the vibrating blades as they tried to cut each other. Kira grit his teeth from the exertion while the thing in front of him kept that same vicious grin. As if to compound his problems, that feeling he's been having since first seeing this cathedral was as strong as ever. And then it got worse.

Look at you, Mr. High and Mighty Ultimate Coordinator.

The young man lost concentration for a moment. That was his own voice talking down to him... though it didn't sound right. He was positive he had never sounded sadistic before.

A boy with his super powerful Mobile Suits fighting entire wars on his own and winning. Always trying to take the moral high ground by only shooting to disable rather than kill, but how many others die anyway? How many have died because their suits were too damaged for them to evade the fire of someone else or how many have died because destroying weaponry and engines on a battleship blew up those sections?

With him so distracted, the copy pushed him back. Even as he shook his head to clear it and get back into the fight, the voice continued taunting him about the kill count he might have acquired even as he was only intending to disable his targets. Where was this voice coming from? It was in his head... did his opponent have some kind of telepathy? That's when it hit Kira; his opponent was copying more than just his current body's abilities.

So that's it. You're in my head because you copied my mental abilities too.

His doppelganger's grin just widened. *I underestimated your mental fortitude a bit. You've already come to terms with the fact that you will kill, even if you don't mean to, when you fight in those wars in your baseline. I'm disappointed now. That's such an easy way to break pacifists and I find it won't work on you. Pity.* As the voice in his head continued, it slowly changed from his to the feminine one the thing he was fighting had before it turned into him.

Now knowing that his opponent was trying to play mind games with him, Kira resorted to something he usually only reserved for when he wanted to hide his mind during a baseline run. There were plenty of benefits to looping into Hogwarts, including Occlumency. He hadn't really known much about that telepathic ability he had gained during the battle against Rau, but Harry helped him gain better control and a way to shield himself from others with similar powers. It looked like he'd be implementing that tactic here.

As his mind cleared and his emotions stilled, the feeling of dread ebbed and the familiar sense of the SEED Factor took its place. The

doppelganger got a somewhat confused look on its face as the contact severed. Then his Parasite changed its setup. The bigger thrusters on his back returned to normal, being replaced by a blocky shoulder armor with some kind of triangular spike sticking out and a very long sword attached to the other side around the shoulder blade. This was a replica of his Strike Gundam's Sword Striker Pack. As such, he grabbed the hilt hanging over his shoulder and pulled the sword free.

With the change in setup came a change in tactics. Just like with his other facsimile sabers, the beam that the weapon was supposed to have was replaced by a solid blade. Kira took full advantage of his bigger sword's superior range over the ones Double was mimicking, as he didn't have all that big a drop in agility compared to the doppelganger's Aile setup. Double might have had the exact same skills and powers that he did, but without the mind connection his Newtype abilities allowed, it wasn't quick enough to adapt as he switched his sword style as rapidly as it could identify and start countering.

At this point, the only reason it hadn't gone down yet was due to the Aile form's superior agility, but that wasn't as much of an asset when facing a slightly slower opponent in an enclosed area. After managing to push him back to obtain some breathing room, Double contemplated just switching to her true form now to fight this foreign looper. As she thought this, Kira grabbed the spike on his shoulder and pulled it off to reveal its nature as the counterpart of his Sword Strike's beam boomerang. It formed a solid metal blade as its owner geared up to throw it, appearing like a discus of death when it left his hand and soared through the air.

In the middle of dodging it, Double realized the trap. Taking advantage of the drop in the doppelganger's guard, Kira struck the area it was dodging to. Thanks to mimicking his organic metal body, the slash didn't cut through it, but the impact stunned Double long enough that the boomerang came back and slammed into its back. With the guard further broken, Kira plunged the blade into the thing's

torso and into the ground. Again, the only thing that prevented a fatal wound was the super tough skin of Kira's copied form.

By this time, the two other ASG Weapons had beaten the traitor from another lab and were watching the results of his battle. After recovering his blade, Kira headed over to his fellow loopers, thinking he had won. He was mistaken, hearing a disgusting sound come from behind him, since his downed opponent decided to switch tactics as well. Gone was a darker duplicate of himself and instead stood a roughly human sized tower of rippling flesh with eyes and mouths in places they weren't supposed to be.

"Looks disgusting, right?" Big Band spoke up without much worry. After all, he and Peacock had seen this form of Double before and beaten it. "Well, she's the last obstacle on the way to the Skullgirl. You and I can take a break afterwards."

Taking a deep breath before nodding to the veteran ASG Weapon, Kira pushed past his revulsion from staring at the Eldritch thing in front of him and took his fighting stance. Beside him, Peacock flicked away a cigar as she took her own stance with the usual cheeky grin. Big Band's grin was hidden by his breather, but he showed his eagerness for the fight just the same.

Time for Round 2!

5.11 Masterweaver

"Surprise!" Peacock shouted gleefully, blowing a noisemaker.

Big Band blinked for a moment, taking in the banner strung across the cathedral. "...What?"

"It was Patricia's idea," Marie explained with a shrug. "Our little way of... well, of saying thank you, for all you've done for all of us."

Carol nodded. "We, uh... all pitched in. I... I made the, um. I sewed the tablecloths..."

"I baked the cookies!" Peacock said brightly. "And also the chicken. Even rice-why do you like rice anyway? It's just so boring! You put it in water and turn up the heat and that's it."

"I kept Patricia from destroying the kitchen," Marie said lightly.

"You're more a menace in the kitchen then I am, toots."

"That..." Carol chuckled. "That is saying something."

"Hey! If there's one thing I know it's cartoon logic! And if there's *another* thing I know, it's kitchen safety!"

"Girls," Big Band said in a firm tone.

Peacock and Carol shared a look. Peacock crossed her arms grumpily. "I'm a good cook. That's all I'm saying."

"You certainly are, Patricia." Marie patted her shoulder. "It's just that you're... enthusiastic."

"It does smell good," Carol agreed. "Reminds me of..."

She trailed off for a moment.

Then she shook her head, managing a smile. "Sorry. Not the time."

Big Band sighed. "I... I don't know, girls. This feels... strange."

"You're in a church with a lich and two cyborgs designed to kill her, and you're piloting a walking metal lung." Marie smiled wryly. "Frankly, I don't know how you can find anything strange anymore."

"Heh. Well... It's more that this is a thing at all, then that this is a thing for me."

"Yeah, I getcha there." Peacock gestured around them. "We're a world of strong women whose men are usually servants or dicks. Finding a nice guy takes some diggin', and something like this wouldn't take off without a lot of nice guys."

"And... I know it's never been official, between us." Carol rubbed her neck. "But... you are... you were there. When I needed it. And you somehow wrangle Peacock..."

"And while I have not actually been granted your guidance and care, I can see how it has helped those who have." Marie nodded toward the other two. "I agree: this is worth commemorating."

"...Alright, alright. You clearly put a lot of work into this." Big Band couldn't help but smile. "Thanks, girls."

"Happy father's day," Carol replied sincerely.

"You deserve it, big guy," Peacock proclaimed.

5.1 (con't) Drakohahn

[Skullgirls][Gundam Seed]

Kira could honestly say that the true form of Double was the most disgusting thing he'd ever seen; a rolling tower of flesh about as tall as Big Band was with mouths and eyes in moving locations. Not to mention, it moved by reaching tentacles out and dragging itself along the ground. Still, it was three loopers on one loop aware... thing. Well, he'd been told that Double was as powerful as her masters wanted her to be... perhaps this was going to be easy... or painful.

Peacock led off on the pair, charging the abomination with her trademark manic grin. That's when Kira saw part of Double's normal fighting style. After all, if you could change shape at will, why limit yourself to just one style? His friend's cartoonish antics were

countered by Double rapidly shifting between various other people and using their skills. One that he spotted was Cerebella and that arm hat of hers. Still, Peacock's experience and zany attacks kept up rather well with the distorted fleshy thing.

Then Big Band launched himself into the melee and Kira could only watch in fascination. It was quite obvious that they were experienced fighters that trusted each other, their attacks flowing together far beyond anything else the young man had seen in combat. They also left very few openings for counterattack with Big Band's arsenal of instrument weapons filling the gaps in the cartoony blows of Peacock. If he admitted it to himself, Kira felt like a third wheel. What could he add to their flow that wouldn't mess it up?

As he wondered this, Double took advantage of an opening to knock the pair back a bit. That's when he got an idea. He smirked a little bit, since it wouldn't be the first time he'd been relegated to fire support. With that thought, his Parasite changed once more. Gone was sword and boomerang and in their place was a rather massive cannon mounted on his left scapula and on his right shoulder was an armored section with a small gatling gun and a pair of holes. With the imitation of his Gundam's Launcher Striker Pack ready, his gatling spewed bullets into the lull of the battle.

The bullets weren't really big enough to do her major harm, but it did cause Double to take a more defensive form for a moment. The foreign looper showed off what the holes were for as a pair of rocket propelled grenades slammed into the abomination before him. Peacock whistled appreciatively while Big Band just smirked under his breather, before the pair shot forwards again to lay on the beatdown. With that setup, it was actually a wonder that Double was able to continue to put up a lasting fight. Regardless of who she became or what appendages she created, the three loopers countered with their combined fury.

After one particular counter Double tried, Kira shouted for his friends to move as he brought the cannon to bear under his arm. Peacock and Big Band took one look in his direction before clearing ground

zero. Even with his legs bracing as well as they could, his body still slid back several feet when he pulled the trigger. While he couldn't yet imitate the particle beams of his home loop, the speed at which his projectile moved meant Double barely had time to take a defensive form before it was struck head on. The resulting explosion pretty much brought the cathedral down on everyone.

The three Anti Skullgirl Weapons made it through the attack just fine with Kira's and Big Band's bodies being more than tough enough to weather the collapsing debris. As they climbed out of the rubble, with Big Band having shielded the younger ASG Weapon, Kira looked sheepish while Peacock grinned at him.

"See, I knew you had it in you! That was awesome!" She and her gang were holding up score cards, with the lowest being an 8.8 from Lonesome Lenny.

"It was an impressive attack, but now we've got to dig up the entrance to the underground mausoleum where the Skullgirl awaits," Big Band stated.

Peacock sagged under the thought of all that work. However, after a moment, she looked at Lenny and frowned at his score card. "Bombs away!" Despite how big Lenny was, the young girl turned cartoon punted him into the general direction of the entrance while lighting him in the process. After a few moments of his fuse hissing, he went boom and a strong explosion blew away the debris.

Kira just shook his head while the toony girl was berated by the veteran for that stunt. She mostly just waved it away since it cleared their path without any hard labor on their part. Despite the light mood that Peacock set as they headed down the revealed stairs, Kira was able to tell that she was forcing it. This made sense to him, as he knew that her friend Marie was the Skullgirl. He never wanted to fight any of his friends, either. It wasn't a good feeling, especially if the confrontation could have been avoided.

Shaking himself out of his thoughts, Kira looked around at the burial site while they descended. It definitely felt like a mausoleum, cold and dead. There were bones everywhere along the ground, providing a disturbing crunch sound as they were trampled under their feet. A bluish glow emanating from a young girl in a maid costume, surrounded by three giant, demonic skulls, who sent cackling energy branching everywhere and providing illumination into the underground. To complete the creepy scene, all the alcoves in this mausoleum were filled with glowing eyes. Kira was unnerved by the whole display, but then, he wasn't used to eldritch abominations either.

He and Ben Birdland watched Patricia converse with the undead maid. Apparently, their conversation was the usual unawake baseline version. As it turned out, Marie had a strong enough strength of will that she resisted the Skullheart enough so that she only went after the Medici and their associates, since they were responsible for what happened to her and Patricia. However, she was reaching the point where the Skullheart would be taking over and Patricia wasn't going to let her end up like that.

As it turned out, despite the fact that she was not Awake, Marie was still a powerful foe. She drew on the bones around her to form her attacks, causing swarms of skulls to fly around and making the dead rise up as her servants. While Peacock wasn't fighting with all her looper potential, they were pretty much even. Heck, Big Band even pointed out that Marie hadn't even reached the strongest she got in baseline. Kira was shocked, considering the power they were throwing around already.

Oddly, Peacock wasn't acting like her typical self. She was fighting with a seriousness that wasn't there even against the true form of Double. Sure, her usual grin was still there, but her attacks were a lot less cartoony than before...her bullets weren't random projectiles and her gang didn't do their normal slapstick antics. Then, it hit Kira... she respected Marie and wanted her death to be an honest one. In Patricia's mind, Marie deserved no less.

"So, you realized it." Kira looked up a Big Band when he spoke. "Patricia loves Marie. She'll do anything for the looping one. Heck, she'll hold a grudge against anyone who harmed her. Well, only one exception to that and she'll still be very bitter about it, if both she and Marie weren't awake during that particular loop. That is why, this is a mercy kill."

They watched as the friends countered each other's moves and rapidly escalated the fight. Peacock's grin slowly closed and Marie gradually became more and more skeletal. Eventually, the young girl dressed as a maid discarded having a humanoid form entirely, her skeletal remains orbited around a skull lit with blue fire. It seemed that Peacock was waiting for this.

"ARGUS!" The Anti-Skullgirl Weapon split open her hat and what looked like a robotic peacock head popped out. Was that Avery's true form? Either way, Kira could tell. This represented the true nature she hid behind the cartoonish antics... Patricia's nature as a Weapon. "AGONY!"

The robotic bird head opened its beak and launched a powerful stream of compressed energy, piercing through her opponent. This was followed up by her converting her arms into rows of eyes behind her... like a peacock's tail. Said eyes flashed before raining a heavy barrage of similarly compressed blasts of energy into her possessed friend. As if to save itself, the skull that had been at the center of Marie's final form separated from her body and tried to flee. Marie's body reassembled itself, but the damage was done and it was starting to disintegrate into green flames.

With the skull, most likely the Skullheart, trying to flee, Big Band picked up Kira to his surprise. "Go get it, kid! End the Skullheart!"

With a mighty heave, the younger ASG Weapon was hurled towards the fleeing target. As he flew through the air, his mind set on the task now given him. He switched from his Launcher state to his Sword state and pulled the massive blade from its rest.

" **Even if you destroy me here, I will merely come back!** " The Skullheart declared as it continued trying to flee. " **I will find another girl who will foolishly wish to satisfy a desire in her heart. The cycle will start over and the world will burn for it!** "

"Every time you rise, another will step up to stop you! It may not be one of us, but for all the impurities in the human heart, there will always be someone willing to stand up and fight for peace!" Kira readied his swing, "ANTI!"

The long blade began its descent onto the eldritch artifact. "SKULLHEART!"

It began to glow a pure white before slashing straight through the fiery skull. "SWORD!"

Kira cleaved through the corrupting abomination as he passed by. The energy of his weapon clashed with that of the Skullheart until it went up in an explosion he could feel on his back. Flaring his thrusters to land safely, Kira turned around to watch Patricia's last words with her unawake friend. She promised that she would complete Marie's vengeance on the Medici family. Then, the Skullgirl's body finally disappeared into the green flames consuming it.

They all left the catacombs without a word after that. Patricia seemed like she was trying to hide the sadness she felt with her typical manic grin. The other two ASG Weapons merely followed behind her to give her space. Eventually, once they were far away from the remains of the cathedral, she'd turn around to face them.

"So, now that we have destroyed the Skull Heart, what do you want to do next?" Patricia directed that at Kira.

"Well, I don't know when this loop ends for you guys, but the Medici are still around. I don't want to leave them alone, with all the trouble they'll cause." Yeah, that was Kira for you. If he thought he could do something to help, he would.

"If you two kids are going, then I suppose I have to play the responsible one and keep an eye on you," Ben stated with a shrug.

"That's settled then!" Patricia declared with a clap. "Until the end of the loop, we're on a Medici hunt!"

Kira and Ben just looked at each other and shrugged. Too much effort fighting her on that one. As they started walking again, the veteran decided to ask Kira a question.

"So, have you decided on a name for your Parasite yet?"

Kira didn't respond for a few moments. After all, he hadn't given it much thought during training nor during this adventure. Still, with how it had saved his life and assisted him in his battles, it deserved at least that much. The pair with him paused so they could hear his answer. He smiled at them.

"Liberty. Her name will be Liberty."

5.12 Masterweaver

Eliza slipped into her private pool, fondling her goblet as she mused.

Well, well, well. A multiverse. One with dangers... and with power. Power, of course, was an intoxicating draw for anyone. She'd gather some herself, obviously... but power without purpose was about as useful as a bank that didn't invest. There really wasn't much she could do, now... not with the Skullgirl looping, or her friends. And Peacock as the anchor...

The goblet came to her lips thoughtfully.

Peacock as the Anchor. Unlikely. All but impossible, from what she understood. She'd looked into the girl's past, after that first loop; torn apart by the Medici after she refused to be enslaved by them. Forced

to kill her childhood friend, usually. But she believed herself to be the Anchor, and as such... going into dangerous situations could result in the loop's abrupt end. And Eliza, well, she was nothing if not dangerous.

Perhaps not as dangerous as before. But even still, dangerous enough for even loopers to avoid... for the moment.

So, disabusing the girl of her beliefs would perhaps not be a good move. No, let her continue to hide away for the good of the world. Eliza would leave well enough alone, and be left alone in turn. As for the others... the Skullgirl was not worth pursuing, with what she knew now, and the two cyborgs could not grant her anything unique. No, for the moment, it would suit her to remain ignored, indulging herself in the pleasures of the world.

And what pleasures they were. The ability to predict, with very little inaccuracy, the motions of powerful individuals... the knowledge of who to claim and how to direct others without gathering attention...

She smiled darkly into her goblet as she watched her guest struggle against her bonds. "Miss Fortune, please. There is no safer place for you to be at the moment."

"I am NOT interested lady!" The feral tried to claw her own arms off. "Whatever it is you're selling-"

"The survival of Little Innsmouth, of course."

The feral stared at her, wide-eyed.

"Oh, not that I would destroy it myself," Eliza assured her. "The Medici, though, know that it was the dagonions that stole their most prized possession. A blood-red gem, I believe... I've little fondness for them, but they can be quite vindictive when they wish."

"So what?" the feral spat. "You'll protect them if I stick around as your slave?"

"There was a time when slaves were respected," Eliza mused. "When they were as precious as cattle, and harming them pointlessly was a crime... Mmm." She rolled her fingers around the room. "I already have wealth, fame, loyal servants. There is, frankly, nothing you can offer me. Except yourself, of course. It's been a while since I had a decent pet."

"Well gee, let me consider your generous offer. Hey, better idea, *go jump off Medici tower!"*

"I'm thinking the dagonions would appreciate a revitalization campaign," Eliza said, sipping her goblet contemplatively. "A few investments, here and there... maybe a small hospice, just in case any, ahem, unfortunate accidents occur. Little Innsmouth is due for a little expansion-overdue, really. Of course it would be a drain on my own stores... I'd need to be convinced."

The feral snarled at her, pulling against her chains. "You could do that without kidnapping me! What's your real angle?"

"So there is a brain rattling in that head of yours!" Eliza smirked. "Let's just say that I am... fond of the way your blood congeals."

"Oh, that's not creepy at all. Yeah, I'm not convinced."

"You know, the Medici have heard about Minette."

The feral froze.

"It would be such a shame," she continued sadly, "if something happened to her, and nobody was around who could save her."

"...You. Sick. Bitch."

"Mmmm." Eliza sipped her drink thoughtfully. "I've been called far worse."

Compiler's commentary

5.1: Sometimes a visitor gets caught up in local affairs. It's always interesting to have an outside viewpoint.

5.2: Annie was warned that staying stealth would keep her from influencing who Activated. She didn't listen...

5.3: Well, he would fit in very easily, now wouldn't he?

5.4: Power comes in many forms. Eliza knows all of them.

5.5: Ordinary is what you make of it.

5.6: What counts luck as good or bad often depends on who you're asking.

5.7: A home-cooked meal is quite romantic! In a pinch, though, fast food will do.

5.8: Slumbering giants tend to respect each other.

5.9: Having one bad day, or even a hundred, does not preclude the possibility of a good one later.

5.10: A grim warning, really.

5.11: Big Band has a Big Heart. Even if it needs help pumping.

5.12: Eliza rested easy, assuming she would have the world at her fingertips as usual...

And if you, dear reader, should wish to contribute your own snip, you are welcome to join us on the Indie Games Infinite Loops thread over on Spacebattles.

Don't That Just Beat All?

It can be difficult to remember, but the loops are run and maintained by administrators. Usually, anyway. Which means that there is, technically, a support staff. It can just take them a while to get around to helping.

6.1 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Friday the 13th]

Carol Awoke submerged in the bottom of a lake. This strange location almost caused her to panic, if not for the fact that she quickly realized why she couldn't drown.

I'm an undead. A reanimated corpse that didn't need to breathe, so drowning wasn't an issue. *Still, I better get out of this place.*

Carol then began t made her way back to the surface by walking. Once she was to the surface, she noticed the black sky above her, before she moved on to inspect her body. Sickly gray skin, no pulse, raggedy clothes, and possible bad odor; yep she was definitely an undead.

"Although the hockey mask is intriguing…" she commented out loud as she touched the plastic mask. Was she a hockey player? One that drowned in the lake and came back to life? That sounded like a plot of a bad movie. "All I need now is to join the local underdog team and teach them the meaning of teamwork and family and we got the Family Friendly Movie of the summer." Zombie Hockey. In theaters soon. "Wow, where did that come from?" That wasn't her usual thought process at all. "I've got to stop letting Peacock drag me away when we are just the two of us Looping."

After that Carol decided to look around the lake which housed several cabins, meaning this place was some sort of camping ground. *Maybe I can find help somewhere…* But then she reconsidered. How would people react to when seeing her undead appearance? Not very welcoming, she deduced.

After so more walking, Carol stumbled upon a bunch of campers drinking beer, smoking weed and acting promiscuous. 'That's not appropriate!' she thought as she watched them from the dense greenery. *Someone should teach them that what they are doing isn't right.* And what better way to teach them a lesson than being scared by a ghoulish undead monster. 'Okay, here we go!'

"Okay, clearly I didn't think things through." Or pay attention to her in-loop memories. They would've told her of her 'triggers' that caused her to go on a rampage and kill people who acted irresponsibly like the one she encountered. "I think a loop in isolation wouldn't be so bad under these circumstances…" And with the recent murders of these campers, the people in charge would have to close the camp, meaning people would not come near this place or her.

"I know it isn't much coming from me, the one who killed you all, but I am really sorry…" Carol apologized at the mountain of severed limbs and heads she had made. "Truly and deeply sorry."

Her only consolation would be that no more people would have to die.

A few months later…

"Again... I am deeply sorry…" Carol once again apologized, but this time to a bunch of unmarked graves. "I didn't know they wouldn't close down the place, but I'm sure after this, they will close it down for good."

One year later...

"Although I am sorry, I can't help but feel that some of the blame should go to the owners of this place who refuse to close this place down after all these murders," Carol said this time to a communal grave she had prepared.

Two years later...

"Okay, now I think the owners of this place aren't the only ones who should share the blame with me," Carol said, exasperated. "After all these murders and all the haunting stories of this place, people should know better by now NOT to come to this place. But did you guys listen? No, you guys came here to party, do drugs and have unprotected sex, not giving a crap. And if you guys don't give a crap why should I?"

One year later...

"You know what? Screw this place and screw you guys! I'm getting out of here!" Carol was really angry this time. "Maybe I'll go to a place where people aren't as irresponsible as you."

One year later in Manhattan

" *Fuck!"*

6.2 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Adminspace]

"Excuse me, Hephaestus, can I talk to you…?" Madoka said as she walked up to the admin while in the middle of some work.

"Yes, what is it?" He turned around away from his work. He was always busy, but he could take a few minutes for a small break.

"Uh… some of the others wanted me to give you this…" The pinkhead took out a piece of paper and pass it to the craftgod.

"Ugh… what now?" He took the piece of paper and read it to himself in silence. "What the…?" The message only read to patch one of Peacock's abilities from the Skullgirls Loop. "What patch? This doesn't say!"

"Um… apparently she had been able to summon objects from other Loops into hers, by opening a small dimensional portal," Madoka explained, already knowing what Hephaestus' reaction would be.

"WHAT?! Why wasn't this brought up sooner?!" Connecting Loops like that was exponentially dangerous for the stability of the Loops. "Who is the one in charge of that Loop?"

"…Nobody…" Madoka answered timidly.

"What?! Someone must have activated it!"

"No one wants to take responsibility for that Loop or even admit for its activation. They all find it… 'too troublesome'…" Well not with those words exactly, since Madoka refrained from cursing. "They've been handing it off to one another for a while now."

"For the love of…" The god of fire facepalmed, trying his best not to get too angry. "I… I'll do what I can…" he sighed, exasperated. "And do me a favor Madoka, go find someone, ANYONE, to take responsibility for this Loop."

"Okay…"

Madoka retreated, not even stopping to suggest herself for the job. *'Just who do I ask for this job…?'* Almost everyone had said no to the

Loop, and she wasn't exactly sure why that was. But there had to be at least someone willing to take the job, right?

"Namaste, I am Kali, goddess of Time, Change and Destruction."

The blue-skinned woman with long black hair and six arms greeted the group of local loopers, who were all stunned by her presence. Not because of the goddess's skin color, or her extra limbs, or her state of semi-undress, since that was not uncommon on their world; what was shocking was that around her neck she had a necklace made out of skulls, a skirt made of severed human hands, and in her grasp she was carrying a sword, a trident, and a constantly bleeding severed head whose blood she caught with a bowl.

"And I have been 'chosen' to be this Loop Administrator," she informed them, completely nonchalant about her own appearance and presentation.

"I like her already," Peacock said with a grin, undisturbed by the goddess's appearance.

"Despite my position, you will not see much of me," she informed them, completely uninterested. "My job is to make sure this world doesn't collapse on itself or present a danger to Yggdrasil." Then she took a piece of paper and handed it to Peacock. "Here, this is a list of recent patches. And now my job here is done, any questions?"

"Yes." Carol raised her hand. "Is there anything being done about the Trinity?"

"No. We cannot do anything to them unless your world can survive without concepts like 'time', 'space' and 'existence' in place," Kali said ironically. "They were one of the reasons why no one wants to deal with your Loop."

No one wanted the headaches of dealing with a trio of god-tier eldritch abominations that couldn't be kicked out of the Loop for fear

of causing another crash and the destruction of another branch. That was why it had been passed from Admin to Admin, with no one wanting to fully commit to it.

"Oh… Alright…" Carol lowered her hand, feeling gloomy. Being rejected at a cosmic level was pretty harsh.

"Hey wait a sec! This thing here says I'm getting nerfed!" Peacock complained as she threw away the list of patches. "This is an outrage!"

"That ability of yours of taking things from other Loops while still inside of your own is a big security breach and a big danger for the Loops," Kila said, unamused. "So it had to be patched for the safety of Yggdrasil."

"Why you…!" Peacock was very close to attacking the blue-skinned goddess, but she was stopped when a claw grabbed her by the shoulder. "Hey what the heck, BB?"

"Patricia…" he used her first name to show he was talking seriously. "Try not to think it as a Nerf, but as a necessary balance." When he received a confused look at the response, the one-man band elaborated. "Think about it. It would be too unfair for the rest of us and all the Loopers in the Multiverse if you had such ability. You are already GOD-Tier, even without that."

That got a smile from Peacock. "Funny thing is… I know you are playing me… but you're right. I am AWESOME!" And she celebrated her awesomeness by taking out a can of Duff Beer and chugging it down.

"Are there any other questions?" Kali asked once again. "No? Then I can leave." But before that, she took another piece of paper and handed it to Big Band. "Here, another copy of the patches list. It goes into detail about everything about them and the changes we made."

And with that final act, the goddess of destruction disappeared, hoping to never come back unless absolutely necessary.

"Well, at least we can be sure that there is someone watching out for our universe," Big Band commented on the silver lining in all of this. "By the way, what was it that you were summoning from other Loops, Peacock?" Since the girl could bend reality around her and create whatever she wants, there was no reason for her to take things from other loops.

"Ants."

"Ants?!" repeated everyone in the room.

"Yes! First I'd summon Mr. Ant." She demonstrated this by placing her hand on a table and making an ant appear. "Then I'd summon another Mr. Ant from another Universe into this one, like say… Mr. Ant from the Gundam Loops or from the Marvel Loops. Then I would take one of the eyes of Argus and zap the Mr. Ants with my eye lazers."

"You mean you almost cause a cosmic incident and risked the safety of our universe just so you could kill ants?!" Carol said, almost flipping out.

"No!" Peacock answered, annoyed at the accusation. "When I zap the Mr. Ants from the other Loops with my Eye Lazer, they just return to their original universe at the exact moment they were when I summoned them." That way, she avoided creating time paradoxes. "And when I zap our world's Mr. Ant he doesn't die, he returns home happily." Once again she demonstrated by shooting a lazer to Mr. Ant making him disappear.

"And why do all of this?" Carol asked, still not seeing the point.

"Because it is fun, duh!"

6.3 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][The Mummy]

"Mmm… this feels nostalgic," Eliza said as she Awoke inside a tomb. Surveying her surroundings, she noticed the inscriptions in the wall which were written in her mother tongue. "Let's see here…"

Eliza read through the hieroglyphs that told the story of the High Priest of Osiris, Imhotep, and how he was found guilty of one of the most heinous and blasphemous crimes one could ever commit: resurrecting the dead, the corpse in question being Anck-Su-Namun, a traitorous mistress who assassinated the Pharaoh Seti I. Imhotep, who was caught in the middle of the ritual to bring back Anck-Su-Namun, was sentenced to endure the Hum-Dai.

"Ouch… poor bastard." Eliza winced at the mention of said torture. Hum-Dai was a malediction used only to punish the worst blasphemers that committed sexual crimes with the pharaoh's daughter and sons, throwing up on the pharaoh, and in this case, trying to bring people back from the dead. The ritual involved the offender's tongue to be cut out, and being bound tight in wrappings and placed in a sarcophagus which was filled with flesh-eating scarabs.

Eliza continued reading the scriptures on the wall, trying to find something else that could be inside the tomb she was in. "Interesting…" The scriptures also told about two books but it didn't go into detail about what they contained.

"Might as well check this place out…" Who knew what sort of souvenir she could find in a place like this. "But first I have to leave this dust chamber."

Indeed, she was inside a tight shut secret chamber that laid undisturbed by the outside. Eliza entertained the idea of maybe breaking down the walls, but she wasn't sure if the structure of the

place could handle something like that. Instead, she dissolved into the sand, turning it red, and from there she moved through the cracks on the wall.

Once outside the secret chamber, Eliza formed back into her 'normal' self. "Let's start with this expedition," she said cheerily since it wasn't every day she found herself in a place that reminded her so much of her home.

Suddenly she felt it. The air around the place was permeated with a feeling of darkness and damnation. As if a great evil had recently awoken, someone besides her of course. "It seems someone just woke up from their nap…"

Eliza smirked as she walked through the halls of this tomb looking for a revived Mummy.

"My, my, my… look at what we have here…"

It didn't take too long for Eliza to find what she was looking for; all she had to do was follow the scent of decay and the screams of fright of the people who accidentally awakened Imhotep. "Looks like you are grumpy…"

The undead Imhotep turned around and looked at Eliza with the new eyes he had gotten from one of the men who opened his sarcophagus and roared like a cursed beast he was.

"I thought as much…" The parasite host remained calm as the Mummy walked menacingly towards her. "Darling, you are not ready for what you are about to face," Eliza said in her native tongue, making the Mummy stop dead on his tracks.

"The Language of the Pharaohs," Imhotep said, with his new eyes reflecting surprise.

"Looks like your brain hasn't rotten like the rest of you," she mocked with a smile. "Let's see if you recognize this…" With a wave, the flesh and blood on her hand moved and stayed floating in mid-air as it spelled a name with hieroglyphs.

"Neferu…" Imhotep read. From the 12th dynasty, she was a daughter of Amenemhat I, wife of Senusret I and the mother of Amenemhat II. "But why is it…?"

"Inside a Cartouche? Because not only I was Queen, **I am also a GOD!** " Eliza grinned as she revealed the skull of Sekhmet that resided inside of her. Seeing the visage of the warrior goddess inside of Neferu made Imhotep take a step backward, feeling fear for the first time in 3000 years. "Now bow to me and serve me as your queen!" she ordered.

Imhotep growled "Never!" He had enough of Pharaohs and serving them. He didn't care if Neferu was favored by the goddess Sekhmet, he was the high priest of Osiris! And with another mighty roar, he attacked.

" **Ha! Pathetic!** " Eliza mocked once more as she too launched herself to attack the Mummy. "I'll show you your place and sent you straight to Duat!"

"That was fun," Eliza said as she walked away from the tomb with lots of Gold from the treasure chamber, but more important than that she acquired two significant books. "The Book of the Dead and the Book of Amun-Ra." She wasn't much for ancient ritualistic spells, but with time she could learn to perform them easily. "The power over life and death..." The thought alone sent shivers through her spine. "Soon I shall demonstrate to Lamia the power of a True God!"

For she was the one who should be adored, not the Trinity.

6.4 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Pokemon]

Eliza smirked as she once again sedated her hunger. Ever since she arrived in this strange new world it had been nothing but exquisite flavors around her. She was worried she would end up putting on some weight. But she couldn't resist, all those different flavors were almost addicting, she wanted to taste them all.

"My, what a tasty little treat this thing ended up as." She looked at the creature on the floor which her loop memories recognized as a pokemon known as Pikachu. "Who knew a rat could be so adorable and delicious!"

Not only that, she had tasted Nidorans, Pidgeys, Rattatas, and Butterfrees. Each with its own particular taste of blood. But why just stay here? There was a whole world to explore, with hundreds of different Pokemon filled with delicious blood to taste.

"I guess it is time for a journey!" Eliza said to herself. "Let's catch 'em all!"

When Pikachu Woke Up, he was instantly invaded with a sense of dread. He could fell there was a greater evil than teams trying to conquer/destroy the world with stupid plans this time around.

Could it be...? A Looper...? There were almost no villain loopers, at least those who hadn't been reformed or constituted as MLE's, so this must be someone he hadn't heard about yet. Still, he was going to stop this evil no matter what.

When Ash and Pikachu entered a clear part of a dense forest, they found what they were looking for, and they were angry about it.

"So it is true what you felt Pikachu…" Ash said grimly as he looked at the downed bodies of several pokemon. "Something or someone is attacking pokemon…"

"Drained all of their blood…" Pikachu commented as he checked the body of a fellow Pikachu.

"Dio?" Ash offered, not really liking the idea.

"No…" the electric rodent shook his head. "If it were Dio, he wouldn't be so sloppy about it." Still, he couldn't blame Ash for jumping at that conclusion; the method of drainage was eerily similar to the vampire stand user.

"So a bloodsucker that eats the same way as Dio, then," Ash clarified before he started using his aura powers to try and get an aura signature to track this bloodsucker. "It is very faint, but I think I got it."

"Good. Let's track this monster and put an end to it!"

Eliza was having the time of her life. So many Pokemon, so many different kinds of tasty, tasty blood. Currently she was just finishing her latest meal, a round pink puff pokemon known as Jigglypuff.

"Ah! Delicious…" After all her meals, she was starting to see a pattern that was forming. "The cuter they are, the sweeter the blood is." Eliza was like a little girl in a candy shop; wherever she looked she found a new delicious treat. If only she had Horace and Albus with her so she wouldn't have to walk everywhere. "Guess you can't always get everything you need…"

"No, but we are giving you what you deserve!" a voice called out behind her.

Eliza turned and found another one of those delectable Pikachu's and a little boy. "My, aren't you a little young to be wandering all alone, little boy?" Eliza said with a sultry smile. "But don't you worry; big sis Eliza will take GOOD care of you!"

"Can it, lady! We are not here to chat!" Pikachu said, surprising Eliza.

"I didn't know you little pokemon could talk… Not that it really matters to me." It wasn't like she felt guilty after she ate so many.

"That's why we are going to put a stop to you, Mrs. Dio!" Ash said fervently, trying to ignore the skimpy outfit the bloodsucking lady was wearing.

"Mrs. Dio? Really?" Pikachu turned to look at his trainer. "That's the best you could come up with?"

"Well, I think it is thematically appropriate!" The method of bloodsucking, not to mention the Egyptian look and regalia, really screamed Dio Brando to him.

"I don't know who this Dio is," Eliza interrupted, "but he sounds like a great man."

"Shut it!" Pikachu answered. "For crimes against pokemanity you are sentenced to death!" Sure it was very harsh of him to do so, but that's what she got for reminding him of Dio.

"So, you want to dance? Let's dance!" Eliza dared as her eyes turned black and the irises yellowish gold. "Come! And bow **to your new god!** " She grinned as she made a golden staff appear. **"Staff of Ra!"**

"Now Mrs. Dio doesn't sound that crazy now, does it?" Ash quipped at his friend.

"Whatever," Pikachu responded before he unleashed a powerful bolt of electricity towards Eliza.

Who blocked by putting her staff between her and the attack and ended up absorbing the electricity and dissipating it. **"Sorry, but you have to do better than that!"** she taunted with a grin.

So, the staff negates electricity! Ash observed. Then the obvious solution was to either not use electricity or get rid of the staff. *Why not both?*

Ash sent a flurry of Aura punches that Eliza could not block with the staff. As the bloodsucker backed down, Pikachu used the opportunity to launch a torrent of fire towards her which quickly enveloped her. "Perfect hit!"

Or so they thought until the fire began to swirl around until it died down, showing Eliza and her staff looking perfectly fine. "Now it's my turn!" The woman shouted as she slid towards the both of them and attacked them with her staff

Both Ash and Pikachu evaded the attack thanks to their superior speed. "Too slow!" Ash said as he prepared another attack, but Eliza just smirked.

"You think?" From her body, tendrils made of blood shot out like bullets and tried to impale the both of them.

"Who do you think you are, Carnage?" Pikachu said as he avoided the tendrils perfectly. But Ash was not so lucky and ended up grazed by them. "ASH!"

"Don't worry! Just a papercut!" Ash reassured his best friend.

The little rat started seeing red. "YOU!" Pikachu moved faster than a bullet and attack the woman with his iron tail, but the bloodsucker was prepared as she extended her arm and let the blood and flesh from it form into a blood shield that resisted the impact.

"Not good enough!" Eliza declared. She transformed her dress and the flesh of her legs into more blood in the form of an alligator that tried to chomp down the yellow rat with one bite. "Sobek!"

Thankfully Ash assisted him with an aura shot that dissipated the blood alligator before he could bite. "What kind of monster are you?!"

"What's wrong little boy?" Eliza bent down, or at least a husk of her flesh did while her skeleton remained standing right up. **"Scared?"**

Then her entire upper body dissolved into blood and re-assimilated into the skeleton. "Now that I have played with you boys, I think it is time to get serious!" Eliza exploded in a shower of blood. As the red droplets fell down to the ground, they began to transform into little scarabs that quickly formed a swarm of thousands. Both Pikachu and Ash tried to keep them from crawling all over them by different means, but for every one they destroyed, two more took their place.

" **Yes, my beauties! Consume their flesh!"** It didn't take long before the little nuisances were drowned under the swarm of scarabs. **"Now you know of the power I wield!"**

After the swarm had left nothing of the bodies of the two, they returned to the skeleton and Eliza was reformed again. As she was about to walk away to continue where she left off, a pair of familiar voices stopped her on her tracks.

"What do you think Pikachu? Is she strong?" Ash asked his best friend as they both sat on top of a tree branch.

"Well, she defeated our clones with that last attack from hers…" Pikachu gave his own two cents. "Still, she is nothing special." Heck, those clones just used very basic attacks, no secret techniques, no combination attacks, nothing all that strong… at least for them.

"What?! How are you still alive?" Eliza questioned, surprised by the presence of those two.

"Clones," both answered at the same time.

"Anyway, we wanted to see what were you capable of, and we have to say it is impressive for someone who hadn't been looping all that long ago," Ash commented.

"But for guys like us who had been around for a LONG time, you are nothing," Pikachu taunted, loving the angry and frustrated face Eliza was showing. "It was entertaining at least."

"I'll kill the both of you!" Eliza shouted as she prepared for another attack.

"I think not!" Pikachu countered.

He unleashed a POWERFUL electric shock that left nothing but a scorch mark where the bloodsucker woman had been a second ago. Not even her staff survived.

Ash looked at his Pikachu not bothered at all by the power behind his attack. "I guess we better start telling the others to watch out for this chick Eliza, in the future."

"Yes. Who knows how much more powerful or crazier she'll get next time we see her." It was like Dio all over again. "Just hope she doesn't end up as an MLE."

"Yes, me too."

6.5 Masterweaver

[Skullgirls][Adminspace]

Ratatoskr skittered across desks, servers, tentacles, and filing cabinets. He leapt through dimensional shifts, quantum strings, other deities' legs, and the occasional time anomaly. True, messages could be carried through the network of Yggdrasil, and they would eventually make it to their destination, but if there was something a bit more urgent it paid, quite a bit, to have a messenger god that knew the tree inside and out. Especially now that it was so ill...

With a final leap and a snip-snop-snap, the squirrel materialized in the office he had been running toward. He quickly groomed his tail, took the scroll out of his mouth, and chirruped out a loud screeching siren sound.

"Gah!" The four-armed woman spun and swung her sword before realizing what she was doing.

"Emergency message for Admin of Skullgirls universe!" Ratatoskr decreed brightly, holding out the scroll as he perched casually on the sharp edge.

Kali groaned, taking the scroll. "Are you staying for a response?"

"No ma'am! This is a Critical Note, not an Urgent Response Needed! I have other messages on my docket and cannot afford to waste any more time! Good day ma'am!" The squirrel saluted, spun, and skittered into the branches of Yggdrasil again.

"Critical note," Kali grumbled, opening the scroll. "Probably some comment on the Trinity screwing everything over in a fused loop, I've already locked them from looping and I'm patching them every... chance..."

Her eyes went over the message again.

"What."

She spun to her terminal, opening up a few windows, and growled. "Of course. Of course, the most troublesome one would begin looping right before this job got dropped in my lap..."

Her lower right hand typed up a quick message to another pantheon, while her two upper hands occupied themselves with the central keyboard...

"Eliza is Looping?!"

"That is what I just said."

Annie sat down, eye distant. "What a goshdarned fudgeup that is. Eliza, of all people... this sugarbowl was bad enough without that cow!"

Kali quirked an eyebrow. "Sugarbowl."

"I'm not able to actually curse, my mouth automatically replaces any 'foul language' with something nice."

"Hrm." Kali crossed a pair of her arms. "Still, as the Anchor of the loop, she is your responsibility."

"Oh, *my* responsibility. Just like the skullgirl, or those crazies in the ASG labs, or the Medici mafia, fudge let's just say everyone in this world is my responsibility because why the heck not? It's not like-"

Kali grabbed the girl's blouse and dangled her inches from her fangs. "You didn't choose this," she hissed. "Fine. You want to complain, sure. You can even stand aside and let all your mortal compatriots grind this world even further into dust than it already is. I don't care. My job here is to ensure cosmic stability. That means telling you that one of yours could very well become the next Malicious Looping Entity. That makes her your responsibility. Understood, child?"

Annie glared into the red eyes of the goddess, fear forced back. "Yeah. I understand, you fudging bird-brain."

There was a pause.

"...You know exactly what I was going to say."

Kali nodded slowly.

"So," Annie said, with just a little quaver in her voice. "Is this the part where you smite me?"

"Hmmm." Kali considered for a moment, and then dropped her. "No. This is the part where I remind you that there are four other loopers in your world, and it might behoove you to actually intervene." She twirled her sword and disappeared.

"...Right. Intervene." Annie turned to her bunny. "Intervene. How am I...?"

She paused, looking at it for a moment.

"...Sagan," she said slowly, "how would you like to have a voicebox?"

The plush rabbit tilted its head curiously.

6.6 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Space Jam]

Ever since people can remember there has been a constant threat to humanity; a being of destruction and chaos known only as the Slamgirl.

The Slamgirls are women who wished upon the JamHeart, an ancient artifact that could grant any woman's wishes. But if the woman's souls aren't jamming enough, the accursed Heart would corrupt them.

The only defense people have against the Slamgirls and her undead army of B-Ballers are the Anti-Slamgirls Labs.

The Anti-Slamgirl Labs are a black-ops research institution created in a time when King Barkley prioritized scientific B-Ball advancements ethics. Founded by Dr. Jordan, they were funded by the NBA government with hopes of understanding the nature of the Slamgirl so they could create basketballs and B-Ballers capable of directly

confronting the menace. Unfortunately, many of the government's subjects were sacrificed in the labs' experiments.

After losing his wife to the Jam Heart and the B-Ball War, King Barkley found himself with a stronger conscience. Despite the continuing need for the Labs in the fight against the Slamgirls, the King moved to decommission their experiments. Once he himself disappeared, however, it was restarted in secret and the lack of official oversight has allowed the Labs' scientists to perform increasingly questionable experiments. One of their latest creations, Peahoops, may prove to be the perfect weapon against the Slamgirl... but can any end justify such horrific means?

The Cyborg B-Baller known as Big Slam sighed in annoyance. "This is a really stupid Loop." But his sense of duty wouldn't let him just bail-out as easy. "Once the world of Jam falls apart, it is our duty to pick it up and slam it even higher." Or so his saying went in this Loop.

6.7 BIOS-Pherecydes

Mutual Parasitism

Eliza Woke, as she typically did, as she stepped free of her limousine into the night air. Before her stood the Medici tower, where the head of the mafia organization and his son waited for her. She considered simply leaving, but recently she'd found herself indulging an almost nostalgic urge. There were countless ways the upcoming confrontation could play out, and she'd entertained herself with an endless number of them over the course of the Loops since she'd first Awoken, but for once she felt like playing along with the original. At least for a time.

With that in mind, she gave her servants orders to remain with the car and made her way into the building. The inside of the Medici

stronghold was a beautiful edifice, and a monument to the wealth and power of the crime syndicate the family had owned and operated for years. Eliza admired her reflection in the polished steel of the elevator as she headed up to the penthouse where her meeting would take place.

'It's been a while since I last visited. Recently I've just had Albus and Horace send my regards to save myself the hassle. I'd almost forgotten how tastefully he and his children furnish their place of business. I absolutely must know the name of their interior decorator before I kill them this time. Talent such as this should be put to better use than serving a decrepit old man and his spawn. Namely, serving me *.'*

Putting that thought on hold for the moment, she exited the elevator onto the floor where the much of the Medici's business dealings took place; both legal and not. Vitale's office suite was located at the far end of the hall this Loop, and Eliza wasted no more time on idle musing. She had an act to perform after all, and it would be unbefitting of one such as she to miss her cue.

Opening the door to the room she immersed herself in her role as a social guest, bid come without explanation. "Lorenzo... Are you there, darling? It's been such a long time. What's the special occasion?"

"I'm afraid that your friend is... indisposed at the moment. Though granting the title of 'friend' to filth of this sort is, perhaps, too high a compliment."

Eliza blinked bemusedly at the scene before her. A man stood in the center of the Medici suite, wearing a rather garish yet somehow stylish outfit. Blonde and well-muscled, he spoke in a cultured tone befitting nobility and well-breeding. At his feet lay the withered remains of the Medici scion, pinned to the wall by several daggers hung the broken form of Black Dahlia, cowering behind his desk hid Lorenzo, and dangling in his grip with his fingers sunk into her neck was the weakly struggling form of Cerebella.

Pursing her lips in a moue of displeasure she sighed. "Oh poo. I wanted to play along this time."

The man paused and met her gaze with a considering look, before offering her a dashing smile. "My apologies dear lady. I hadn't been aware that you were Looping. I had planned to tender my greetings to you by taking it upon myself to remove this eyesore in your stead. Indeed, how could I do any less after learning of the slight which they dealt you in your Baseline? That such as these would dare attempt to blackmail a beautiful desert flower like yourself is unconscionable."

Eliza graced the man with a smile. "Oh, you are a flatterer."

Returning the gesture, he allowed the now empty shell in his hands to fall to the floor and offered a gentlemanly bow worthy of any court. "Flattery implies an exaggeration, whereas I speak only the truth. Tell me, dear lady, why do you allow men like this to treat you as anything less than the goddess which you are? Would it not be easier to simply grind them beneath your heels?" Turning sideways he pointed dramatically at the petrified Medici patriarch. "Yet you allow them to casually insult your dignity and attempt to place themselves above you; to threaten you and yours, when they should prostrate themselves before you and be grateful for the honor of doing so."

Caught by surprise by the question, and the sheer force of charisma behind it, Eliza took a moment to actually consider her answer. "I suppose it would be because it amuses me. I find their hubris to be an entertaining spectacle, like children playing make-believe without understanding. I admit that in the Baseline I grew somewhat indolent, and their patronage allowed for a degree of luxury that I otherwise would have been required to attain for myself; far easier to go along with their fantasy and take advantage of their ignorance than to expend the effort myself."

The man nodded agreeably. "I grant you that. Leveraging assets to greatest personal gain is simply good sense. And indeed, what is life

if not the pursuit of pleasure? Money, power, fame, and glory. Lovers and other primal desires. Countless little distractions to enhance and improve one's enjoyment of all the world has to offer."

Abruptly he stood straighter, spoke louder, his presence filled the room as he met her gaze. "But what of respect?"

He took a step closer, his eyes unwavering. "What of pride?"

Another step. "What of standing before those who would dare to call themselves your equal, to demean and dishonor you, and laughing at their audacity before casting them down?"

Reaching out he took her hand in his and placed a kiss above her knuckles. "What of standing atop the world as the pinnacle of creation and ruling as the goddess you are?"

The words sent chills down Eliza's spine, painting a picture in her mind of majesty and might. Everything she desired. Everything she *deserved* . This man...

She smiled coquettishly. "It occurs to me that I have not had the pleasure of making your acquaintance."

"Oh? How discourteous of me. I am DIO, and truly the pleasure is all mine."

The name sent a spark of recognition through her, and she recalled a meeting with a yellow rat and its human pet which had interrupted her vacation. Unbidden, a smirk made its way across her face. "It seems your reputation precedes you. I know of you, though until now I did not have a face to go with the name. Though I must say, darling, the wait does certainly seem to have been well worth it."

"The feeling is most certainly mutual. Upon Awakening and recognizing my surroundings I could not help but to seek you out. For you see my dear, I am building an army. One of such might as to shake the foundations of reality itself. When the Loops end I intend

to crown myself the king of all creation. And what good is a king without a queen? Join me, Eliza, stand by my side, and when the dust settles and our enemies lay beaten at our feet I will give you the world. This and any other you may desire."

"Well, well. How forward of you. Of course, I do like my men assertive." Leaning in she ran her fingers lightly across DIO's chest, suggestion and promise all at once. "Why don't we go somewhere more private and get to know one another better?"

DIO grinned. "It would be my pleasure. Though perhaps it would be best if we tidied up the loose ends before our departure."

Eliza paused, then laughed. "Oh, of course. Lorenzo dear, how could I have forgotten you? Where ever is my mind at?"

Without leaving the cover of his desk, the Medici family head shouted at the two of them in a voice that tried to hide his fear using anger and failed miserably. "Leave me be! You've already taken my son! What else do you want? Do you want money? Stocks? Property? Slaves? Name your price!"

"Oh darling, what I want can't be measured in riches. But I will settle for a snack. Oh, and I am simply dying to know who does your decorating."

6.8 XeroM56

[Skullgirls][Fatal Fury]

It was a relatively peaceful night inside the Geese Tower, the most prominent skyscraper in South Town, which served as the base of operations for the Howard Connection.

On the surface, the Howard Connection was a powerful protection agency, created by entrepreneur Geese Howard, which strived to

help the people of South Town. But its well-meaning portrayal in the media was mainly a front to deter investigators from the kingpin's connections with the mafia. Geese's crime syndicate businesses often overlapped with Howard Connection, and most of Geese Howard's underlings posed as employed by the company as personal security, making Geese Tower one of the best-protected buildings in the whole country. To stir trouble near the premises of such place was to invite death itself; no one was crazy or stupid enough to even try to do so…

Well…. there was just one.

Inside the main lobby, two crooks dressed as security guards were amicably talking with each other, utterly unaware of what was about to happen.

"Then what?" asked one of the crooks prompting the other to continue his story.

"So I says to Mabel, I says-"

BOOOOOOM!

The tale was cut entirely off by a sudden explosion that decimated a wall and the insides of the place.

"Da fuck?!"

The two guards ran towards the newly formed hole in the wall and saw two silhouettes behind the dust and debris that had form. "Stop right there!" They pulled out their guns and took aim, prepared to shoot when they had a clearer view.

POOMB!

But that moment didn't come. Instead, one of the guards had his brain blown off by the sudden impact of a bullet against his skull.

"What?!" The other didn't have a single second to even process the death of his partner before a machete came flying through the air and embedded itself in his skull, making it explode as if it were a watermelon.

"Nice shot!"

"Thanks, nice throw there!"

The assailants complimented each other before continuing their way in.

On the very top of the Geese Tower, the man for whom the building was named after was very angry.

"Who?! Who dares attack my building?!" He slammed his fist on an expensive looking desk with a furious expression on his face.

"S-Sir! We d-don't know yet b-but…" one of his many underlings tried to explain, but he was terrified by the man's ire.

"Then get out there and find out!" Geese ordered once again. "And bring me their heads on a platter!" Though he was usually a very collected man that kept his cool under the most intense of pressures, this attack on his building made Geese uncharacteristically angry. He took it not only as an attack against him but also a stain on his reputation. "Bring me their heads so I can crush their skulls myself!" No one, and I mean, NO ONE, dared do this to GEESE HOWARD!

"Y-Yes sir!" the underling saluted before bolting out of the boss' office to carry out his orders.

"Damn!" Geese growled under his breath. This sudden attack couldn't come at a worse time. He had recently announced the King of Fighters tournament, he already had the media's attention on him. If they were to launch an investigation for this probable attempt against his life, they could get wind of some of his more seedy

activities, and it was always a pain in the ass making those nosy investigative reporters disappear.

"When I find out who's behind this, I'll make them all pay!" Geese slammed his fist on top of his desk one more time in anger before something unexpected happened.

KA-
BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

The doors to his office exploded open filling the entire place with smoke.

"What the…?!" There was no way! There was no way the assailants were already on the TOP floor where his office was.

As the smoke slowly cleared away, the two mysterious assailants made their way in.

"Who?!" Geese couldn't believe his eyes. In front of him, there were no other than a strangely dressed ginger girl and a white-haired maid. "Who the hell are you?" Geese rose from his seat to show his imposing frame.

"We warned you!" the ginger girl holding a baseball bat covered in nails replied with an angry tone. "We warned you not to Fuck wit' DA GIRLZ!"

"Girls?! What girls?!" Geese demanded before he thought of something else. "No, you don't have to tell me who sent you kids here… I'll enjoy beating the answer out of you." The crime boss grinned as he cracked his neck and knuckles to prepare himself for a fight. He didn't care if his opponents were little girls who should be in bed by now; if you messed with Geese Howard, he was going to mess you back.

"You grimy ass motherfucker. You thought you could stop us didn't you," the girl with the bat growled as she spat on the expensive

carpet of Geese's office. "Why yo hatin'? You mad cause our dicks is bigger or what?"

"What did you say?" Geese shout as he chopped his sturdy desk in half with one single strike to emphasize his strength. "Why don't you come here and say it again?"

"Because of you, the sales of our newly released game went unnoticed by everyone!" the ginger girl said without a hint of fear on her voice as if the previous display of power was nothing for her. "You know that after the initial week of release, the chances of a game recovering its production money are almost none!"

"Game?!" Geese repeated back, confused.

"You and your stupid ass King of Fighters Tournament! You taken away the interest of our potential costumers! Now we take your life, you bitch!"

"All of this…" Geese replied solemnly with a cold look on his eyes. "You attack my building, kill my men and ruin my office… for a fucking VIDEO GAME?!" He stomped his foot on the floor, making it crack. "DON'T YOU KNOW WHO I AM?"

"A dead man, that's what you are," the girl responded with a smirk before looking at something behind him. "Isn't that right Marie?"

' *Wait! Where's the other one?'* Geese thought, before he felt a cold sensation on his chest. Looking down, he found a curved edge sticking out of him. *'I didn't see her move.'* The mob boss turned his head around to find the other assailant, the white-haired maid, who had just stabbed him with a scythe of all things.

"Here, take this!" the girl who hadn't moved pulled out several flyers and threw them in the floor in front of him, before the girl who stabbed him let him fall into the floor. "Any publicity is good publicity, I'm sure that whoever finds your corpse will be interested in acquiring our game."

She turned to look at her accomplice and said. "Come on Marie, let's go." The maid's only response was a nod in accordance. "Put on some Murda Musik!"

As the two left his office, leaving him to slowly bleed out to death, Geese couldn't help but look at the pamphlet near his face which read the title of the game in big letters.

"S-SKU-UUU-LL…GI-IIIRLSSSS….." he gurgled before dying.

Half an hour later, after committing cold-blooded murder, Marie turned to her friend with a worried look. "Patricia…"

"Yes, Marie?" Peacock asked as she was serving herself and Marie a congratulatory drink.

"I'm getting worried," Marie confessed. "I grow concerned with the way you are acting."

"You mean, committing a terrorist act by bombing a tall skyscraper in the middle of a heavily populated town, killed a bunch of mafia goons dressed as law-abiding security guards and finally murder a multimillionaire entrepreneur with a flimsy excuse of wanting to promote a fighting game?" Peacock resumed her actions on the current Loop in a nutshell.

"No, no, no, all of that is fine," Marie said, shaking her head from side to side. "I meant the 'Gangsta' talk… I think it's kinda offensive to appropriate the lingo of a group of the people who identify with that culture." Especially since Peacock was the exact opposite of what that kind of culture represented, being a white red headed girl.

"I guess it was out of line…" Peacock admitted with a small frown. "Okay, I promise I won't act like a wigger unless the loop demands it."

"That's all I ever wanted." Marie smiled as she gave Peacock a small hug of appreciation.

6.9 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Adminspace]

"Zeus, I need to have a word with you," Kali said as she intercepted the head of the Greek pantheon.

"Hey, it's you… um…"

"It's the first we've met." And the Hindu Goddess would've preferred to never meet him, but she had a job to do. "We have to discuss something important."

"I'd love too but I'm kinda busy," he said, not really interested in what she had to say.

"As the new Admin for the Skullgirls Loop, I have come across something in the Loop's data," Kali informed him, not really amused about what she had found. "I discovered an incredible amount of porn in it."

"So? What does that have to do with me?" Zeus said defensively.

"I just find it strange that a Loop no one claims to have activated, and no one wants to administrate, happens to have hidden codes for porn in it," Kali deadpanned, not believing for a second in Zeus's claim of ignorance. "Could it be that the Loop was recklessly activated just so that SOMEONE could hide their secret stash on it?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," Zeus said as he crossed his arms in front of him.

"Look, I wouldn't have cared about the vast amounts of porn hidden in the Loop, if it hadn't caused any problems," Kali said, annoyed. "But when I tried to delete some of it, I found out I couldn't."

"Couldn't delete…?" Zeus asked, his curiosity piqued.

"Don't know how or why but it seems there had been a small glitch." Kali suspected that the trio of Eldritch abominations were probably behind it. "A soul was either infected or perhaps created because of this glitch with the porn. The end result? ZONE."

"ZONE?"

"So congratulations to whoever put the porn there," Kali said sardonically, "they just become a father and it's a girl that really takes up to her parents."

Zeus just went silent for a whole three seconds. "S-So…are you going to report this?"

"No," Kali responded. "This 'glitch' may have become an integral part of Loop's code and cannot be erased without serious repercussions, but it hasn't caused any sort of problems to the Loop so far." Except for when it made one Loop crash, but that was because of the intervention of certain little looper.

"If there is no problem why talk to me about it?" Zeus wondered.

"Oh! There is a problem alright," Kali said. Anger crept into her voice, yet she remained calm. "Because from now on, whenever I work with the Loop, I keep on finding more and more porn. And I informed you because I want you to know that I will make the life of whoever is responsible a living hell. That's all," she finished with a cold tone that could send grown men crying back to their mamas. She wasn't known as a fierce Goddess for nothing.

"S…sure…" Zeus remained calm, holding back any nervous sweat from forming on his brow. "I'll be on the lookout for the one

responsible."

"If you will," Kali said as she turned around to get back to work, already thinking up way to get back at the jerkass father god. "Oh! I'm Kali, by the way. My domains are Time, Change and Destruction!"

6.10 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Jojo's Bizarre Adventure]

"I've been expecting you Mr. Shiobana…" Peacock greeted as she turned around the chair. She was sitting in at the Office of none other than Lorenzo Medici, former clan head for the Medici Mafia. "I can see you brought along your friends…" she added, referring to the two individuals that followed him.

"Who are you? How do you know of us? And where is Lorenzo Medici?" Shiobana Haruno, more commonly known as Giorno Giovanna, demanded, looking at the girl behind the desk suspiciously.

"The name's Peacock, I know you because of my friend Marie who Looped as Jotaro's aunt, and Lorenzo Medici is currently been disposed of," Peacock answered quickly. "But enough about that, let us talk business!"

"Business? What kind of business?" Bruno asked, trying to assess the strength of the strange looking girl.

"It is known that you guys usually go around overthrowing Mafia heads and then taking charge, so I assume you guys wanted to do the same when you heard about the Medici in this Loop, correct?" When she received just a nod as a response, she continued. "Sadly we do not take kindly on Mafia members here or from any other place."

"So, what does that have to do with us?" Narancia asked, not really getting what Peacock was talking about.

"I have a proposition for you three," Peacock informed them. She took a big breath beforehand. "I invite you all to forget about your silly Mafia takeover and instead try to enjoy the rich culture the Canopy Kingdom has to offer. Heck, I can even hook you all with a few Dagonian Ladies in Little Innsmouth, for those of you who always had wondered what it feels like to court and bed a reverse mermaid."

"And if we refuse?" Giorno asked out of curiosity, not really tempted by the girl's offer of 'escort' fish girls.

"Simple. I'll simply dispose of those who refused my generous offer," Peacock answered with a shrug, very full of herself. "You'll have to be a complete idiot to refuse."

Giorno turned to look at his crew, who all just nodded at him. "Sorry, but I'll have to refuse your offer," the Gang-star said, turning back towards Peacock-who was playing with one of those red eyes she had on her metal arms. "We will take control over the Medici Empire and all of its operations."

"And don't you worry; we will put a stop to the unsavory ones," Bruno added. They might have been gangsters, but they were not monsters.

Peacock sighed as she pulled out one of her arm eyes. "Are you sure? Because if you take this path there is no coming back," she warned them and waved her eye in a disapproving manner.

"Yes," Giorno replied without hesitation.

Peacock looked at him with disappointment. "You asked for this." And then from the eye she had pulled out from her arm, a lazer shot out directly at Giorno.

The Gang-star and the rest of the crew were expecting Golden Experience Requiem, Giorno's Stand, to nullify Peacock's attack, but it didn't. The lazer hit Giorno directly in the chest, 'vaporizing' him instantly.

"WHAT THE FUCK?!"

"So? Who wants to go next?" Peacock asked, ignoring the outburst of incredulity.

"How did you do that?" Bruno demanded. "How did your attack bypass GER?!"

"Attack? What are you talking about? That wasn't an attack," Peacock said with a confused look.

"Bullshit! He was vaporized! " Narancia rudely pointed out. "That shit was an attack!"

"But it wasn't! I just sent him to a safe place!"

"What?"

"Yes, my Ant Lazer is supposed to send back anything that doesn't belong to this universe back to where it came from, but since the Admins nerfed my abilities, the Lazer acts the same way as it does when it hits something from this universe and sent anything to their safe or happy place," Peacock explained, much to everyone's bewilderment.

"And where is Giorno right now?" Narancia asked.

"Don't know." Peacock shrugged. "He could be on the other side of the galaxy for all I know, but it is different from person to person." Meaning that if she zapped them all with her lazer they could be scattered to god knows where. "So anyway… who wants to go next? Or have you reconsidered my offer?"

Bruno glared at her. "How do we know you aren't just lying?"

"Because I would've come up with something a little more creative, for example, the lazer sends you back in time and forces you to become your own grandfather, or something." Peacock rolled her arm eyes. "Again, which is going to be? My way or the highway?"

"Can't you bring Giorno back?!" Bruno asked, still on edge. He was prepared to attack the girl when the opening presented itself.

"I just told you I don't know where he is," Peacock deadpanned, looking at the gang member like he was an idiot. "Besides, I'm sure he is happy wherever he is."

"Oi Bruno, you don't believe this bullshit, do you?" Narancia looked at the older gang member, waiting for any instructions on what to do now.

"She doesn't seem to be lying…" Bruno admitted. "Also, she could've told us that she killed Giorno to make us doubt and question her true power, but she sticks to that ridiculous story of hers…" Not to mention, with all the crazy crap that happened in the Loops, it wasn't ALL that farfetched.

"So gentlemen! Do you wish to continue with your futile takeover and be sent to god-knows-where, or do you wish to spend all of these Bones on the River King Casino, courtesy of me of course," Peacock offered once more as she put a large burlap sack filled with money on the table. "And maybe after that, enjoy the picturesque view and people in little Innsmouth and have traditional Dagonian Cuisine. Later you can visit Canopolis, the capital of this Kingdom, and visit the Renoir Grand War Memorial, and learn more about the history of this place, and finally you can end your visit by attending a the NMO Arena and watch an electrifying wrestling match starring Beowulf in his triumphant comeback from retirement."

"What are you a travel agent for this place or sum'thing?" Narancia rudely asked.

Peacock's eye twitched in annoyance. "Look take the money and fuck off, or I'll kill the both of you. No Ant-Lazer for the two of you." Really, why were they still in this office when they could be outside having drinks, gambling at the casino and having Human, Feral and Dagonian bitches all over them?

"Oh yeah? Bring it on, B-"

Narancia was eager to battle but his enthusiasm was cut short when Bruno placed a hand on his shoulder, stopping him. "Excuse our previous behavior, Ma'am. We accept your offer and leave."

"What?! You can't be serious!" The young boy looked at Bruno with betrayed eyes. "We can take this broad!"

"No we can't," Bruno stated, dead serious. "I've been alert for any openings and opportunities to strike, but I haven't found any since we entered this office. Not only that, we aren't exactly sure what other sorts of tricks she has up her sleeves." If a teleporting lazer she shot out of an eye she had on her arms was any indication, this girl could have anything prepared for them. "We were overconfident, and we lost. Better cut our losses when we can."

"You are way smarter than that blondie with the ass hair," Peacock conceded. "Here, take this coupon with a 50% discount for blimp ride over the Kingdom, the safest way to travel."

"Thanks…" Bruno accepted the coupon, not really planning on using it. "We are going to go now."

"Oh! Excellent idea! I'll be close behind, just let me finish something in this office…"

Peacock stood on the chair and began covering the whole desk in front of her in gasoline and later the whole room. "Now who wants to do the honors?"

When neither of the gangsters said anything, opting to escape out of the office, Peacock just shrugged and light of a cigar. "More for me I guess," she said, before taking a large puff and then dropping the cigar making the office catch on fire. "Good thing this place has insurance." And all of that was on her name. "Now, time to party and get wrecked!"

6.11 Masterweaver

The doors to the Bath of Tefnut burst open, thirty-nine rageful eyes sweeping the room as the interlopers entered. A thick metal fist slammed Horace into a pillar before he could react; Albus's charge was halted when a set of blades grabbed his ankles and smashed him into the ground repeatedly. The two small girls at the front of the procession practically crackled with power, one crouched low so the myriad of eyes she had could literally glare daggers, the other hovering off the ground and wreathed in bones.

Eliza took a sip from her goblet. "So, I take it the jig is up?"

"You bet your ass it is," growled the orange-haired girl.

"Hmm." Eliza nodded. "Very well... can I ask what all this is then?"

"You cannot possibly believe we would allow you to continue your crimes unabated," the white-haired girl said, her voice reverberating throughout the room.

"And how, exactly, are you going to punish me?" Eliza asked. "Kill me? That just sends me on to the next loop. Torture me? Not only is that difficult, what with me being what I am, but it just gives me personal reason to hate you and tear apart everything you hold dear. Imprison me? The same problems as the above, really." She shook her head. "Honestly, girl. You've got the heart of a dead goddess. You should know that you can't win against a living one."

"You are no goddess," spat the emaciated girl hunched over in the corner.

"Theon. From the greek Theos, meaning god. Theonite, theonic resonance... there's really no reason not to call myself a god, except to avoid attention." The woman gave them all a smirk. "Yet here you are, bursting through my door to have a frank and presumably violent discussion, so avoiding attention goes right out the window."

The largest of the intruders narrowed his eyes. "Whatever you are aside, you've got to answer for all the people you've killed."

"...I'm sorry, did I ever harm you?" Eliza asked. "Come to think of it, I'm fairly certain the only person I ever hurt here was the Skullgirl and, well, you've all killed her at least once, haven't you?"

"It doesn't matter that you didn't hurt them," the hovering girl said flatly. "What matters is that you harmed at all."

"How high and mighty, coming from the orphan who slaughters hundreds every loop just for being born into a family of less-than-legal businessmen." She gestured at the girl with eyes on her arms. "You have an excuse for the killing, but not so much the rampant property damage." Her eyes drifted to the emaciated one. "You, well, the blood on your hands is usually just the price of your freedom. So I suppose you could be considered innocent. And of course, the noble knight in the back." Eliza nodded at the big man. "Oh, you don't kill. You save lives. Where did that end you up? Trapped in a walking iron lung? Still, your principles are strong... My word, here I was trying to guilt trip you, and you've got nothing to be guilty of, do you?"

The room was silent for a moment.

"So." Eliza stood. "We could have this nice, dramatic fight where you beat me into the ground with everything you've got. I'd quite enjoy the challenge, even if I were to lose. And what would you win? Nothing. I wouldn't be gone forever, I certainly wouldn't change my

ways... perhaps wealth could be yours, but I know at least one of you can steal it anyway. If you want me to restrain myself... well, you'll have to convince me. Give me a proper argument." She leaned on her staff. "Tell me, what do I get by turning over a new leaf?"

"Us off your back," the cartoonish girl said flatly.

"Mmm. I think you're overestimating how much I value your opinion."

"We could ruin your reputation," the emaciated girl threatened.

"You?" Eliza laughed. "Look at you! The skullgirl, bane of civilization! A toon reject and a horror picture villain! And of course, who could forget the man in a suspicious trenchcoat? A two-bone street thug would look reasonable next to you. How do you think you could ruin me? Expose my dirty laundry? Nobody would believe you, and nobody would trust you."

She shook her head. "Let's face facts. You're not here because you want justice, or revenge, or even just some way to keep me on a leash. You know that's impossible right now. No, you're here because you want to know what I want. So I'll make it easy for you. I want to be worshiped, adored, I want to be able to ask for anything and get it because everybody loves me. And surprise, surprise: They already do! Of course loopers have a bit of a different opinion, but there are always dissenters who need to be put in their place. I'll boil this all down for you: You don't provoke me, you don't get in my way, and I will leave you alone."

"...You've attacked loopers before," the man pointed out. "The pokemon loop, after all."

"Mmmm. A mistake on my part, perhaps." Eliza rolled her eyes. "To be frank, I don't think any of you have thought out this confrontation at all. Why don't you just head home, think about what it is you want to say, and come back when you're ready to be serious?"

The other four stared at her for a moment.

Then, slowly, they pulled themselves out of combat stances, walking out the shattered doorway.

"Mmmm." Eliza shrugged, taking her seat once again. "Well, that's that for now, I suppose. I doubt I've seen the last of them..."

6.12 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Jojo's Bizarre Adventure]

"This is certainly weird," Kujo Jotaro exclaimed as he looked at his granddad Joseph Joestar visiting his cell without Avdol. Instead, he was accompanied by a tween girl dressed in a maid costume. "I know that Japan age of consent can be as low as thirteen, but this is low even for you granddad."

"Don't say stupid things like that! People might get the wrong idea!" Joseph said, embarrassed. After he calmed down a little, he introduced the girl beside him. "Jotaro, I want you to meet Marie, she is Awake like the two of us. She is your aunt this Loop."

"Hello," the girl greeted with a respectful bow.

Jotaro gave a big sigh. "Yare yare daze…" First Josuke and now this. Did his grandfather know no shame? "Just let me get out of here."

A few minutes later, they reconvened back on Jotaro's house and asked Holy to go out for groceries so the three of them could have a chat.

"So… is this your first fused Loop?" Jotaro asked the brown-haired maid girl.

She answered by shaking her head. "Not exactly… but it is my first time without anyone I know of." Or more specifically, without Patricia, also known as Peacock. "Excuse me for intruding in your lives," she apologized very politely.

"No need for that. We receive visiting Loopers all the time," Joseph reassured his adopted daughter for the Loop. "Just feel free to think of this as your home." Really, Joseph could never say no to pretty girls.

"Thank you, Mr. Joestar," she answered with a smile. "I really appreciate your warm hospitality."

While Joseph looked charmed by the girl, Jotaro couldn't help but feel a little odd about her. She seemed too polite. But he decided not to voice his suspicions since there had been other loopers that also rubbed him the wrong way, but turned out to be okay people.

"So… do you have a Stand? Or any sort of fighting ability," Jotaro asked without reservation. "Because this place is very dangerous for those who don't know how to fight." Not like they have ever received any Loopers like that before, but his point still stood.

"Oi, Jotaro!" Joseph reprimanded. "Don't be so rude to Marie. She's fairly new to the Loops."

"I'm just saying that if she has none, she better stay far away from our usual business."

Marie, on the other hand, tried to ignore the brashness of Jotaro's comment and nodded. "Yes, you could say I have fighting experience. Do you want me to show you?" she asked in a very cold manner.

"Yes. I would like to see," he answered back with a deadpan tone of his own.

Suddenly the entire room seemed to get colder as some sort of strange sensation filled the room. Then Marie's brown hairs began to turn into silvery white, and her eyes turned from blue to bright red while the image of a skull formed inside of them. A pair of skulls appeared on Marie's head and part of her maid dress ripped open to expose her rib bones. As she summoned a demonic vacuum cleaner and alongside it, a spectral silhouette with bright blue veins all over it appeared behind her.

"Prepare to get swept up."

"I don't think so," Jotaro said as he summoned his own stand, Star Platinum.

"You two, calm down!" Joseph interjected trying to avoid a fight. "Jotaro, you wanted to see Marie's power, but a fight isn't the best way to go about it."

"Why not? How are we going to determine if she's useful if we don't have her show her abilities?" he shot back to his grandfather.

"Because, she knows who's the one replacing Dio," Joseph revealed.

Jotaro looked back at him with a shocked expression. "What?" It wasn't like it hadn't happened before, but for Dio to be replaced was a strange event indeed.

"Yes, take a look." Joseph showed him a psychic photograph. Instead of the usual visage of Dio, it was the image of a woman with an Egyptian look and motif.

"Who is she?" Jotaro asked as he returned the picture and retired Star Platinum.

"Her name is Eliza," Marie said as she returned back to her 'normal' form. "In my world, she's a celebrity diva of New Meridian's premiere nightclub, Bastet's Den. She is also a Parasite Host."

"Parasite Host?" Jotaro repeated back questioningly.

"Parasites, or Theons as they were once called, are creatures that bond to a person's body, providing augments to their host. Despite the name, they appear to form a symbiosis with their host, drawing nutrients from their bodies in exchange for acting as a means of enhancing their host's combat capabilities. Some Parasites can operate completely independently of their host; these are classified as Remote Parasites."

"You could say that Parasites are their world's version of Stands," Joseph summarized. It was a fair comparison since some of the Parasites Marie told him about were about as powerful as some of the Stand users of their world.

"I see…" Jotaro nodded in agreement. "So what does Eliza's Parasite do?"

"Her Parasite, Sekhmet, is a bloodthirsty parasite inhabiting Eliza's skeleton. Sekhmet is responsible for keeping Eliza eternally young by absorbing the blood of others. It also enables Eliza to control her own blood as a weapon," Marie explained. "Also it may be capable of operating independently of its host, but I haven't confirmed this yet."

"So, basically a wannabe Dio in female form," Joseph commented jokingly. "Except her abilities do not involve stopping time like Dio's The World does." That was a relief.

"I wouldn't take her so lightly," Marie said solemnly. "She's also Looping."

"What?" Now that was alarming. "Villains don't usually Loop." There were a few exceptions, with 'exceptions' being the key word. "It would be insanity if they could. Imagine how many MLEs would be out there."

"Eliza may be rotten to the core, but she is not a menace to the Loops themselves," Marie told them. "I confronted her before, and she is more interested in carnal and worldly desires more than destruction and complete control of everything. Although she had tried to conquer my world before just so that everyone adored her as the god she believes herself to be."

"So you're saying she is more of akin to a Sakura Syndrome than an MLE, correct?" Jotaro pointed out.

"Yes," she said nodding. "Nonetheless, she is still a menace and must be stopped."

"Agreed," both Jojo's said accordingly.

"So, do we teleport and jump directly to the fight? Or shall we take the long road again?" Joseph wondered out loud.

"I'll suggest taking the long route!" Marie voiced her opinion.

"Why?" asked Jotaro, who really didn't care either way.

"First, she isn't currently doing something overly nefarious, just biding time." Marie then raised two fingers. "Second, because she will probably send agents against us and they could provide some useful info about some of her abilities that I may not know of." She then raised a third finger. "Third, I would like to see what this world has to offer and see how different it is from the Canopy Kingdom."

Joseph couldn't help to laugh at the last one. "Sure, I would love to show you how diverse this world of ours is!" It would be interesting and entertaining to see the wonder in the eyes of a child when she looked at all new and exotic things the world had to offer.

"Hn. I don't care either way," Jotaro said knowing that if things started turning ugly on Egypt, they could always teleport immediately. Besides, since Dio wasn't there, his mother wouldn't start developing a stand and her life wasn't in peril.

"Good! Let's go right away!" Joseph announced excitedly.

But reality soon called him back with the sound of his daughter Holy arriving. "I'm back! I'll start making dinner immediately!" she announced.

"But first we had to think of what to tell Holy."

6.13 XeroM52

Everyone inexplicably awoke at the same time and in the same place. Clearly, there was something weird going on.

"What…" Peacock was about to ask about this strange phenomenon. The Loop came to a screeching halt and crashed.

Kali looked at her monitor and sighed in annoyance. "That's the third time this has happened." It seemed that this Loop couldn't handle the censoring virus from those Shoggoth-chan hackers. It was trying to censor the Trinity, causing the Loop to crash. Not to mention all the gratuitous T&A besides ZONE. "Ugh. Damn you, Zeus!" And no matter what she tried she couldn't come up with anything to remedy the situation. "Someone fix this already!"

"Sister? Are you alright?" Venus, goddess of space, asked her reclusive sister Aeon, goddess of time, after she saw her sister fret in front of her own computer.

"It's my weavenet friends…" Aeon said with a hint of annoyance in her voice. "The guys from Shoggoth-chan hacked into our branch and they didn't inform me!"

"Well, you were busy with that new Beowulf doujinshi, if I remember correctly…" Venus recalled all the hours her sister spent shut in her

room. "And the body pillow…"

"I know! But they should at least have the decency of not infecting our annexed Loop!" Aeon complained.

"They're Eldritch Abominations! Their whole existence is being the biggest assholes in the room." Venus facepalmed. Although she had to admit, she and her sister acted pretty mean to the Loopers too. "You do remember all the ********** pics they keep sending us?"

"Yes, I used them as inspirations for my tentacle doujin."

"Sis…" Venus sighed as she pushed up her glasses. "I think you should leave your computer for a few hours and come and help Mother and me to keep the virus from coming unto our home."

"Fine," the shut-in goddess of time agreed reluctantly. "I wish we were full on admins, though."

"Hey, at least they're talking to us."

"Talking down to us, you mean. A few planes of reality higher, and suddenly we're just children..."

6.14 Wildrook

[Skullgirls][Jojo's Bizarre Adventure]

Someone dressed like Jotaro Kujo was seen in a casino as a Shout-Out.

Jotaro looked at the scene in question. Part of him was surprised there was a DIO copycat running around, but another part had wondered how the hell he got involved in this mess.

"Yare Yare Daze..." was what he muttered. "If it pleases your leader, I'll come quietly. I've been feeling Loopy."

Adam was surprised. "You're kidding me," he muttered. "All we want to know is how you managed to escape Eliza's grip."

"I've dealt with someone that's arrogant, but I REALLY don't like people coming onto me... freaking parasite."

"Hang on," the cyborg Big Band replied. "Jotaro Kujo, age 17... you look older, to be honest, but I can relate to being Loopy."

Jotaro got the signal he needed, but he didn't expect his data to be involved with the local army. Then again, considering these guys had a grudge against Eliza, he figured if they were the closest thing to Nazis like his Grandfather told him, better the devil you know than the devil you don't. There were vampire-eating creatures that were either destroyed or launched into space, but the premise was still there.

"Like I said, I'll come quietly," was what Jotaro replied, looking at Big Band as if he were a fellow Stand user.

On the ground, Eliza was wheezing. She got a few hits in, but she didn't expect him to pull a five-second time stop with a wrecked vehicle.

"You got lucky this time, Jotaro..." was what she muttered. "But I know you have low defense involved with time stop..."

6.15 Masterweaver

"YEAAAAAHAHAHAHAHA!"

Peacock cackled as she swerved her bandwagon around another corner, smashing another Medici goon beneath its wheels and

blasting a revolver one-handed at the mob that had only just realized their barricades were not going to hold. Marie was in the bench seat next to her, clinging to the door with one hand and her vacuum cleaner with another. Her skin was as pale as always, but the blue wisps of light pouring from her ribcage had increased and highlighted the tension in her face.

"Patricia," she began as they rumbled down the road, "I know you don't mind breaking laws-"

Her grip tightened when they practically splattered through a few man-shaped road bumps.

"-and ordinarily I'd be quite willing to indulge you," she continued, even as Peacock idly snapped on the windshield wipers to clear off the red. "A good slaughter, a little robbery here and there-"

Peacock spun the bandwagon on its right front wheel, tilting it dangerously close to falling over as she flung multitudes of heavy objects at the mob shooting at her.

Marie swallowed, grateful that she didn't have a stomach. "It's..." She fought down the nausea she somehow felt. "It's just that, well, we are in a rather dense metal cabin, with glass and other easily shattered components-"

One of the objects Patricia had thrown happened to be Lonesome Lenny. The large bomb scratched its surface casually with a cartoonish hand, moments before its fuse sparked to nothing... and then it exploded just as the bandwagon's other front wheel hit the ground. The end result was the vehicle being flipped into the air, spiraling end over end as Peacock cackled maniacally.

"PATRICIA I WANT OFF THIS CRAZY CAR!"

Peacock blinked, flicking an eye petal to look at Marie-who was pushing herself tightly into the chair padding with magic glowing like a flashlight and teeth and eyes both clenched tight.

She sighed, reached out, and caught a passing lamppost. The bandwagon spun like a pendulum once, twice, almost a third... before swinging back. Once Peacock let go, the whole thing fell to the ground and landed heavily on its battered wheels.

Marie opened her eyes, looking around wildly.

"Hey, Marie, look, I'm sorry-"

"DON'T!" Marie opened the door rapidly and scrambled out. "JUST... Don't, Patricia. We didn't even have seatbelts!"

"It's an old model," Peacock protested weakly. "And-Look, Marie-"

Marie slammed the door shut, not looking at her as she took a few deep breaths.

"...Should... should I go?"

"Patricia," Marie replied slowly. "I understand you like your thrills, and I know you're probably very good at stunt driving. I just... suppose this particular thing isn't my thing."

"...Okay. Next time you're in the bandwagon, I'll obey the rules of the road, okay?"

"That would be nice, yes. And..." Marie turned around with a sigh. "I think I need to go calm down, but... can we agree this is just a bump? Not... a serious thing."

"Yeah, sure. Just a little rough patch." Peacock nodded. "Hey, uh, I left the fellows back there and there's still some Medici scum that needs killin' so-"

Marie nodded. "Yes, go on. I'll be waiting for you at the ice cream shop down the ways, when you're done."

"Alright." Peacock put her foot to the gas and spun the bandwagon around. She revved the engine with a cheeky smirk; the old car

seemed to crouch on its haunches before pouncing forward with a roar.

The skullgirl shook her head. "Why did I have to fall in love with such a crazy character?"

6.16 XeroM52

Big Band sighed for the nth time that Loop. He had been planning to take the Loop to relax and rest after his last Loop. Unfortunately for him, he was the only one awake besides Marie, which was great since he didn't have to worry about dealing with her unawake self. But soon after tragedy struck the world of TV when the live action actress and voice for Annie: Girl of the Stars was apparently the victim of a murder attempt. Fortunately for the child actress, she survived but now she was in a deep coma, saddening children everywhere; with Patricia being one of them.

Annie occupied a big part of the girl's heart; it was one of the last remnants of her innocence and childlike wonder alongside the memories she shared with Marie. Now, after this tragedy, the girl was a mess. She was uncharacteristically moody and she snapped back at everyone at the smallest provocation, especially since the perpetrator was still at large. It made Big Band worried that she might snap and kill someone… ehm… someone that didn't deserve it.

Anyway, Big Band had taken it upon himself to look for clues and bring the criminal to justice so that Patricia and children everywhere could rest peacefully knowing that the person responsible of hurting their idol received what he deserved. After some 'interrogations' around the city, Big Band finally had a clue where he could find the person he was looking for. Unfortunately for him, it was a popular hideout for the Medici Mafia and one particular parasite host. Bastet's Den.

Ben knew that entering the place was going to be difficult, especially with the way he usually looked he wouldn't be able to even get past the front door. So, utilizing the magic spell he learned from Louise to transform his body at will, he reverted back to who he once looked when he was an active officer for the New Meridian Police Department. It had been so many years since he was declared dead, so no one would recognize him. Also, he decided to forgo his classic trench coat for something more stylish. Instead he wore a white suit over a formal blue silk shirt, with a white tie and white fedora hat to complete the disguise.

' *Here goes nothing,'* Ben Birdland thought as he arrived at the club. Strangely enough, there was no bouncer at the front door. This instantly sent up alarms to his mind, but he was determined to continue. He had come too far to give up now. With nothing to fear, Ben opened the door and made his way in.

The moment he stepped in, the whole place fell into complete silence as everyone gathered in the place turned to look at him with narrowed eyes. Ben had crashed a private party for the members of the Mafia and everyone was ready to jump at him the moment he did something stupid. Heck within the members, there was the infamous Black Dahlia, the faithful bodyguard of Lorenzo Medici and the first Anti-Skullgirl Human Weapon to ever be created by the ASG Labs.

If this had been his old self, Ben would've been completely terrified, but after living so long and seen so much thanks to the Loops, this was a walk in the park.

In a very calm manner, he placed his hand on a pocket inside of his coat. This caused everyone one the place to place their hands on their guns ready to shoot him, but then he revealed what he was trying to get.

A silver coin.

Despite being an object that presented next to no threat, everyone on the bar was still on the edge waiting for Ben to do his next move.

And the detective delivered in style when he flipped the coin making soar through the air across the room and in an astounding display of accuracy, the silver coin felt directly inside the jukebox's coin slot turning the music back on.

As the music blared on, the mood of the whole place began to change, and Ben took this as the opportunity to move his way in at the rhythm of the song. He couldn't explain why, but all the people around his also followed suit and resumed whatever was it that they were doing before he came in, all while moving and dancing to the song as well, almost as if they couldn't help themselves. But hey, if it made his work easier who was he to complain?

As he moved through the crowd, he set his eyes upon his first suspect: Black Dahlia. He needed to get info out of her, but he couldn't do it in the traditional manner, fearing he would break whatever spell was affecting the place. So instead, Ben began to sing.

The lyrics of the song detailed the crime scene and what probably happened when the assailant broke in to attack Annie. The criminal entered her apartment and left bloodstains on the carpet, meaning the first attack happened in the living room. Annie then tried to escape using the furniture, like crawling under the table and then ran into her bedroom and locked the door. It was just then when she was struck again sealing her fate.

The whole thing was a classic closed room mystery. How did the assailant manage to attack Annie after she had sealed herself inside her bedroom? Very few people would be able to pull that sort of stunt; Dahlia been one of them.

But the more Ben thought about it, it made less sense for Dahlia to be the assailant. Her alibi? Well, Dahlia was proficient with the use of the knife, but the fact that Annie still lived cut her off the suspect's list. Dahlia NEVER failed any assassination mission she took for Lorenzo. And even if the plan was to just attack Annie and put her in the hospital, sending Dahlia for a mission like that made no sense.

So back to square one. Now time to look for suspect number two.

Sliding through the room, Ben finally found his second suspect who was being harassed by drunken morons who wanted to show her a "good time". Not wanting to waste any time, Ben walked towards the two idiots and clobber them sending them to the ground, something that no one around seemed to mind. Heck, even his suspect looked glad for what he had done.

This next suspect was Cerebella, 'the Diamond of the Cirque des Cartes'. She too was proficient with the use of knives as deadly weapons and was known to work as an 'enforcer' for Vitale, one of Lorenzo's sons.

But as Ben watched her move and dance to the rhythm of the ongoing song, his suspicions began to dim.

Cerebella might be dedicated to the Medici, but she was still a good kid. She was only rather close-minded and in a state of denial regarding any claim to Medici wrongdoings. And despite her fanatic dedication for Vitale, she wouldn't go as far as to do what this assailant had done to Annie. Intimidation tactics and maybe a slap or two, but to plunge a knife into Annie, who was just a little girl, was not Cerebella at all.

Another suspect crossed from the list. Still, there were a few other 'enforcers' that could have done the deed.

Dancing by, Ben came across a bunch of goons playing poker and betting large sums of money. Nothing really worth noting about, that is until Ben noticed something. As the winner of the round was about to collect his winnings, Ben grabbed his arm and twisted it making some cards fall from the goon's sleeve exposing him as a cheater. Ben didn't think much about two-bit goons like these ones, but even he made an exception to expose cheaters and put them on their place. And put him in his place he did when Ben still holding onto the goon's arm flipped him over and threw his cheating butt to the floor. The rest of the goons around just laughed and gave him thumbs ups

while they bopped their heads at the music. Ben just tipped his hat and marched on.

As he walked away from the poker table, he passed by a pool table with people playing, but one punk in particular thought it would be funny to 'accidentally' hit Ben with a misfired white billiard ball. But before the flying projectile could even hit him, Ben turned around and caught the offending object with his right hand. Then in a showing display of physical strength, he crushed the ball into mere white dust. After that, he finished by walking up to the punk that tried to pull that stunt on him and blew the powdery remains of the white ball into his face. This earned him a few laughs, but Ben didn't care, he couldn't waste time with these punks, he had a criminal to catch.

Seeing he got no luck on the first floor, Ben decided to move on and try his luck on the second floor of the place. Going up the stairs he came across someone he honestly didn't want to meet. It was none other than Eliza, thankfully enough it was her 'unawake' self.

Eliza, like the rest of the patrons, was under the influence of the strange musical spell that was placed on this local, bobbing and dancing. Eliza was a capable seductress that could cajole any man under her will, something she was trying on him if her provocative glances and moves were any indication. But Ben knew all too well that under that appearance, laid a bloodthirsty beast ready to pounce and devour any unfortunate soul that ended up lured by her charms.

Ben decided to ignore Eliza's advances and continued on towards the second floor. She wasn't even in her list of suspects since Eliza didn't work for the Medici and when she did it was only when they were blackmailing her by threatening to reveal her secret as a host for a bloodthirsty parasite. Besides, even if Eliza were to take the job, she wouldn't have used knives. She would've sucked Annie dry. So no, Eliza wasn't the culprit, end of story.

On the second floor, Ben didn't find much besides more goons dancing around and trying their luck with the waitresses. One scumbag in particular crossed the line of Ben's limits when he

slapped a waitress for turning him down. The undercover detective took pleasure in punching the daylights out of that classless loser and throwing him down from the second floor.

Once that guy was out of the way, Ben turned to check on the waitress and see if she was fine, but as soon as he turned his back a shadowy figure appeared and try to attack Ben from behind. Nevertheless, the result was the same as with the misfired white ball, because Ben quickly turned around and grab the offending hand of his would-be attacker. It didn't take more than a second for Ben to identify who was his assailant. It was "The Jack of the Cirque des Cartes", and another Enforcer for the Medici Mafia, the Elfin bard and parasite host known as Taliesin.

The elf was another suspect that Ben instantly crossed out from the list. He might have been a womanizing dirtbag, but the attack of Annie wasn't in his M.O patterns. Taliesin put great value in physical beauty to the point that for him, others weren't people but rather "things"; especially women whom he objectified sometimes quite literally, thanks to his ability to transform whatever 'objects' he touched into musical instruments.

Had Ben been his previous self, he would've worried about being transformed by Taliesin's cursed touch. But now the Parasite host's ability only made him laugh. Transform him into a musical instrument? He was BIG BAND! He already was mostly musical instruments. So this effeminate looking Elf posed no threat to him.

Ben just gave Taliesin a solid second look of pity and shame before he twisted the elf's artificial hands until he tore them off and let them fall to the ground. It might have been a little too aggressive for his tastes, but Ben held no sympathy for guys like him.

After that and not finding anything of relative interest to the case on the second floor, Ben made his way back to the first floor to check back in case he had missed something or someone.

Down on the first floor again, the music and the dancing continued, but as soon as Ben had made his way to the middle of the room, the whole place turned dark as well as silent because of what could only be a sudden blackout. The undercover detective worried that whatever spell the music had created was gone and that everything was going to return back to normal, robbing him of the chance to find whomever attacked Annie.

Annie… that poor girl; the hearts and peace of mind of millions of children who were fans of her and the show she worked on rested upon his shoulders to find and bring the perpetrator to justice. He wasn't going to let the chance slip away from him. If there was no music, then there was always a capella.

" *Annie…are you okay?"* Ben sang with his heart with the poor girl struggling to live back in the hospital. *"So, Annie are you okay? Are you okay, Annie?"* When he saw the rest of the patrons slowly bobbing their heads at his signing, Ben knew the spell was still active and he needed to continue singing. *"Annie, are you ok? So, Annie are you ok? Are you ok, Annie?"* As he continued with the song, the rest began joining in too. "Annie, are you ok? So, Annie are you ok? Are you ok, Annie?" then above everyone else, Ben voice resounded once more, *"Annie, are you ok? So, Annie are you ok, are you ok* ***Annie?*** *"* Then the whole building lighted up again in an instant and the music blared on again, and the signing and the dancing returned for a second round.

Once everyone was distracted by the groove again, Ben danced across the room and found something he didn't expect; a lonely patron sitting at a small table, not even dancing in place. Now that was really suspicious.

As Ben walked towards the lonely patron, he soon realized the identity of this person: "The Club of the Cirque des Cartes", the fierce magician known as Beatrix.

Ben had investigated Beatrix before, she was the bitter rival of Cerebella, wanting nothing more than take the "Diamond's" spotlight

in the Circus and within the Medici ranks. As a magician, she too was proficient in the use of knives, especially throwing daggers. She also wielded the Cloak of Damocles, a magical object that was basically a subspace pocket except this one required great concentration in order to keep the contents inside; not only that but also the ability to disappeared and appeared in different place. Combine all of that and you have the prime suspect for the assailant. A bitter magician proficient with knives, who would do anything to climb through the ranks of the Medici Mafia, and that could easily enter Annie's apartment without forcing the door or windows and could 'disappear' out of the crime scene leaving a 'locked room' scenario.

Ben knew Beatrix was the one he was looking for, and she knew it too if the sudden tension of her muscles and her glare towards him were any indication. Ben was ready to confront the magician here and there and take her to the authorities, but fate had other plans for the two of them.

Ben could hear them, even with the music going on, he could hear the mobilization of armed troops surrounding the building ready to storm the place. The detective mentally cursed his luck, why did the Egrets have to come in? And why were they doing it? Yes, members of the Medici were gathered here for a party, but in the eye of the general public, the Medici family were entrepreneurs and a very respected clan. So it made no sense for the Canopian Military to come here.

Unless the Egrets were here with the same intention as him: to capture Annie's assailant. Ben knew that Young Princess Umbrella was a fan of Annie's show, so it wasn't unbelievable she managed to convince Parasoul to use the Egrets to find the culprit. Unfortunately for Ben, he was about to be caught like he was a member of the Medici.

So Ben was about something, he never thought of doing before, but as they say, desperate times required desperate measures. Faster than anyone could blink, Ben took out a Tommy Gun and fired in the

air to cause enough panic and force the Egrets to retire enough for him to make his escape.

In the end, his plan was successful, except he also lost track of Beatrix who used her Magic cloak to disappear from the scene. But all in all it wasn't a wasted effort, now he knew who the perpetrator was. Now all he had to do was to track Beatrix down and bring her to justice.

"No better time like the present to hunt down a smooth criminal."

6.17 XeroM56

[Skullgirls][Jojo's Bizarre Adventure]

Back in one of the most luxurious and finest penthouses money could buy, two very infamous loopers were enjoying a relaxing evening.

"Dinner is finally ready," Eliza said as she sat down across her special guest. "I hope I didn't keep you waiting for long, darling."

"You are lucky you are one of the few people I, Dio, forgive for making me wait," said none other than the notorious MLE, Dio Brando. "I expect this meal to be nothing short of perfect."

"Oh! I am sure you'll love it and if it's not of your liking, there is always… 'dessert'." Eliza gave a predator look that promised lots of fun after dinner. "Albus! Horace! If you please." The parasite host snapped her fingers and her two bodyguards appeared bringing a large golden covered platter and place it on the table.

"I hope this is of your liking." Horace, being the most refined of the two, bowed politely before turning to Albus and dragged him away to leave their boss and her guest alone.

"Dio-Darling, I present to you, today's main course!" Eliza lifted up the cover to reveal said dish.

"Mh? I can't say I was expecting this." Dio said surprised while looking at the meal.

In the middle of the table was an olive-skinned cat girl with a gag ball on her mouth and tied up with steel shackles and dressed in skimpy leather lingerie. But the more interesting thing about the meal was it was still fresh and full of energy if her struggling was any indication. "But I'm afraid I found Cat Girl not really that filling."

"Oh! But this one is special," Eliza informed him with a smirk, "She is an immortal cat-girl! No matter how much you eat of her, she always recovers completely intact ready for another meal. It is her immortality that makes her blood very piquant!"

"Hm… Indeed it smells that way," Dio noticed once his augmented sense of smell noticed the aroma of the catgirl's blood.

"What do you say, Dio-darling? Would you like to share this meal with me?" Eliza said flirtingly.

"Yes, let's."

6.18 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Adminspace][Madoka]

"Hephaestus! May I have a word with you?" Kali asked as she approached the ever busy craftgod.

"Is it urgent? Because I'm a little busy right now." There was only so much he could take on his plate.

"I just want to ask you I simple question," Kali said, slightly uneasy- something that was rare for the blue woman. "Can there be fused Loops with Madoka's Loop?"

"No," Hephaestus quickly answered, turning away from his work to look at Kali. "Why do you ask?"

"There is something I must show you…"

"After I was chosen to be in charge of the Skullgirls Loop-" something Kali wasn't particularly happy about- "I've been noticing a strange trend that left me baffled the first time I encountered it." She turned on her monitor to show Hephaestus what she was talking about.

"Is that Madoka!?"

"No," the goddess quickly corrected, "But they have quite the resemblance…"

She was referring to Filia Medici, who the monitor showed to be dressed exactly like Madoka and with pink hair too.

"She's not the only one…" The monitor changed to show other Loopers and non-loopers looking like several people from Madoka's Loop. "Sayaka Miki, Homura Akemi, Mami Tomoe, and Kyoko Sakura. They are all present." All of they been played by Peacock, Cerebella, Ms. Fortune and Squigly respectively.

Hephaestus looked at the monitor in complete silence trying to process what he was seeing. After a whole minute, he turned to Kali. "Explain, now." He needed to know everything that Kali did in order for him to decide what to do next.

"At first I thought it was a strange glitch, but after some research and seeing it happen again, I think otherwise."

"This has happened before?"

Kali nodded. "Yes. I don't know the exact parameters that causes this strange loop, all I know that it happens when no one is awake… well besides the Loop's Anchor Annie, but she… she never interacts with any of her fellow Loopers, and decides to travel to distant planets when this kind of Loop happens."

"So, this is a recurring event…" Hephaestus thought worriedly. "Tell me, what did you find in your research?"

"After taking a closer look at the code for each of the Loopers and non-loopers affected, I found some foreign data attached to them," Kali revealed with a very serious tone.

"You mean…"

"Yes, although they are just bits and pieces, there is data from Madoka's world in them." The blue goddess then changed the image of the monitor. "Which explains why they don't act entirely like their counterparts."

The monitor showed Ms. Fortune's Mami acting more roguish instead of ladylike, Squigly's Kyoko was a refined lady, Cerebella's Homura was a show-off, and Peacock's Sayaka was… well, Peacock. The only one who acted remotely the same was Filia's Madoka, but that was because their personalities didn't clash like with the others.

"What about the rest of the world? Are they affected too?"

"Well…" Kali decided that instead of explaining it herself, she showed it in the monitor.

It was a coarse imitation of Madoka's Loop. Although the world looked the same as always, with the Canopy Kingdom resembling a dark deco version of a mix between California and New York instead of Japan; the setting resembled Madoka's. Kyubey in this case

played by the shape-shifting Double, made girls/women take wishes upon the Heart transforming them into Magical Girls. She had them hunt for Skullgirls, this Loop's version of the Witches, who were magical girls how fell into despair. The fundamental difference was the magnitude of the wishes that could be granted by the SkullHeart and the reason for creating Magical girls; instead of harvesting energy to fight entropy, the mission of Kyubey/Double was to strengthen the magical girls by pitting them against increasingly more powerful Skullgirls, which in time would turn create even more powerful Skullgirls, in an endless cycle. That was until the Loop eventually ended.

Hephaestus again fell into a deep meditative silence after he watched the whole thing.

"So far, this Loop as happened 1 every 500 to 1000 loops give or take," Kali informed him. "I don't know what causes them or why there is foreign data of integrated into the Loops code." The Trio of Eldritch Abominations known as the Trinity could have something to do with it, though she had no evidence of that so far. "But so far it hasn't caused crashes or any other sort of trouble. But I thought you ought to know this was happening."

Hephaestus took a deep breath before finally speaking. "Thanks for informing me about this. Please continue to monitor the situation and keep me informed of any updates." He was too busy with other Loops and working on fixing the tree, he had no time to dedicate himself to this situation unless it presented a risk to the tree itself. So for now, the priority of this mystery remained very low.

"Should we tell Madoka about this?" Kali asked, making the Craftgod halt for just a second.

"No," he answered solemnly. "She doesn't need to know. This matter will remain between the two of us until there's more information about it."

"I understand," Kali agreed with a nod. "I'll keep up the investigation."

"Please do." And with that Hephaestus left carrying with yet another thing to worry about later.

6.19 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][DC]

Peacock Awoke in a discomforting manner for once, lying on a cold steel floor with a small headache. "Damn, not the best way to Awake…"

"Will you shut up, I have a headache…"

Instantly Peacock forgot all about her discomfort and looked around her. She was surrounded by a bunch of freaks in costumes. *'Oh, either Marvel or DC…'* She wasn't well versed in her superhero wiki facts since she had only loop at the Marvel Loops a couple of times and never DC.

' *This is going to be fun…'* Peacock thought as she tried to stand up, only to feel the cold floor on her feet. Then she realized something about her own body.

Flesh, flesh where there was supposed to be metal; inside her mouth also she noticed the lack of metallic feel in her teeth. She had real teeth! And more surprising of all she had eyes too. Everything that she was seeing was with her true eyeballs. All in all, it was quite disorienting.

' *Huh? I'm in my slave clothes too…'* She never thought she would have to wear these dirty rags and shackles on both arms and legs, not mention the metal choker on her throat. According to her assimilated Loop memories, she was a war orphan from a country that probably didn't exist anymore; in that harsh environment for dog eats dog, she became a proficient killer. All of her victims were soldiers several times her size, but none of them presented a difficult

time. The only thing Peacock didn't know was how or why she came to this place surrounded by these freaks.

"Look like we have rookies," one of them said. A man wearing an all-black combat suit. He was Floyd Lawton, aka Deadshot, one of the world's best marksmen and hired assassin. "And a little girl apparently…" Soon after the others recovered as well and stood off the floor.

"Who are you people?" an African American man asked as he looked around him. "And why am I in uniform?" He was Eric Needham, aka Black Spider, a vigilante that was wanted for killing numerous criminals.

"No bars… no chains…" said what could only be described as a monster. Not only was he the biggest around, his sickly gray skin and large black fingernails clearly indicated that this thing wasn't completely human. He was the serial killer known as King Shark. "Time for meat!" He tried grabbing a woman's leg but he received a powerful kick in the nads as result. Then the blue-haired woman retaliated by punching him with a specialized shackle that encased both of her hands.

Once King Shark was down, the blue-haired lady, known as the metahuman criminal Killer Frost, straddled the beast and press her shackle against his throat. "You try, fish fingers, and I'll show you the meaning of cold-blooded," she threatened, much to King Shark's enjoyment.

"You're feisty."

"Everybody shut up!" Deadshot tried to call the group. "I've been here before."

But before he could elaborate more, a brute ran towards one of the steel walls and tried punching it, leaving a deep dent. "Nagh! I am leavin'!" He was Russian Mercenary, wanted for his attacks towards several American occupied posts all over the world; he was the

KGBeast. As he was about to continue punching, the sudden appearance of a new voice made everyone turn.

"Stop this instant," ordered a large black woman, who wasn't phased one bit at being in the presence of several super criminals and assassins. "Sit down!" she commanded once more and everyone did what she told, including Peacock. "I am Amanda Waller. I'm here to indoctrinate you convicts into our special forces."

"Pass," Killer Frost said, clearly not interested.

"I kill to keep degenerates off the streets," Black Spider informed, not wanting to work for the government. "I won't work alongside them." Especially if he had to do so in the company of criminals.

"Fresh air and you cut time off my sentence? Feel free to keep calling me," One of the 'veterans', Captain Boomerang, said without apprehension.

"Task Force X is an off the books government strike team," Amanda continued on, not really caring to hear the convicts protests or brown nosing. "Made out of convicts with no hope of release; serving as expandable agents for impossible missions," she clarified to the 'newbies' so they would be up to speed. "Succeed, and I'll shave off time of your sentences…" she said leaving the rest hanging.

"If we don't?" Black Spider was the one to take the bait.

"You'll be dead," Amanda said, steely. "Any other stupid questions?"

But before Peacock could even try to make a clever joke, Killer frost beat her to the punch. "Yeah. What's on my neck? A tracker?"

"Yes. And a powerful nanotech explosive." Amanda then summoned holograms that showed the bombs planted in everyone's neck. "Run away, get yourself captured, disobey an order, hell, give me a right answer too slowly and I blow your head clean off," she threatened with such coldness that made everyone's skin crawl.

"So kinda like that movie!" Peacock exclaimed making everyone turned their heads to her. "You know, the one with all the kids been forced by the government to participate in this fights to kill one and other."

"Oh you mean that movie about the Games and the Hunger?" a dumb looking blond tried to guess. She was Harley Quinn, Joker's number one accomplice.

"No! I meant Battle Royale, you dumb bimbo." Peacock's eye twitched in annoyance. *'For that answer she's definitely on my List now!'* While she was debating what kind of stunt she would pull on the Blond Bimbo, everyone else was looking at her with disconcerting eyes.

'Just who the heck is that girl?' and 'why is she here?' were some of the questions on everyone's mind. All except one…

"Enough!" KGBeast said while standing up. "You will not take all this trouble just to kill us." He was confident Amanda was just bluffing.

Said woman looked at him with no clear emotion on her face and stepped aside while an exit opened behind her. "Try me."

Everyone then turned towards the Russian Merc to see if he would dare or not. Some with annoyed looks, others with expectant crazy looks like Harley's. KGBeast decided to call Amanda's bluff and leisurely walked towards the exit passing next to Waller. But as soon as he took one step from the room where everyone had woken up, the tracker on his neck began bleeping menacingly.

The poor bastard didn't have enough time to even scream before the explosive blew up, separating his head from his neck. As his headless body fell onto the floor, Amanda turned to look at the remaining operatives. "Anyone else?... I didn't thi-"

"HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA! What a fucking Noob!" Peacock interrupted Waller with her insane cackling. "HAHAHAHA!

Please tell me you recorded that! HAHA! Cause I want a copy to watch it every night before I go to sleep! HAHAHAHAHA!"

Everyone, even Waller, looked with apprehension at the cackling little girl that could barely reach beyond most of their waists. Even Harley Quinn looked at the girl thinking it was too much.

Peacock finally managed to get her laugh under control as she wiped out the tears that had formed in her eyes for laughing too much. "So tell us what the mission is, Aunt Jemima. Do you want us to kill Uncle Ben?"

Amanda decided to ignore the girl for now, after giving her a small cold glare. "You are going to infiltrate Arkham Asylum." This announcement was received with several objections, with only Harley looking forward to the mission. "The mission involves breaking into the asylum, and retrieving back a memory drive containing vital information about past, current and potentially new members of the 'Suicide Squad'. This memory drive is inside a small ball on The Riddler's cane. So it is your job to break in and retrieve the drive before it could be leaked onto the internet."

"I don't think we can work with two wildcards," Black Spider said, looking at both Harley and Peacock.

"Harley Quinn has an encyclopedic knowledge of Arkham's layout and its logistics," Waller explained the vitality of the blonde's role in the mission.

"What about miss chuckles over there?" Boomerang asked pointing at the red-headed girl that was grinning like a fool. "What does she bring to the table?"

"Obviously I'm the team mascot!" said redhead replied. "I'm here to provide the comic relief otherwise being in this team would be too depressing."

"What the Peahen is trying to say…"

"Cock!" she corrected. "The name's Pea-cock!"

"What Miss Watson, brings to the table…" Waller countered by using the girl's real name. "Is that she is an infiltration expert. She managed to break into several military bases and killing everyone on the premises, including a camp of Special Black Ops."

"Aw! You have been reading my diary, don't cha?"

"Miss Watson, do not test my patience," Waller said, glaring at Peacock. "Do not think for a second that I wouldn't activate the bomb in your neck just because of your age. I don't care if you are 12 or 40 years old, if you disobey an order or endanger the mission, I will kill you."

"Geez, remind me to never appear on your Live show, Oprah!" Peacock crossed her arms and turned to Quinn. "Besides… shouldn't we worry more about Blondie?"

"She's right." Deadshot agreed with a nod. "Is she going to be okay with the Joker nearby?" he asked, not knowing Peacock wasn't talking about the Joker at all and actually referring to Harley's airheaded attitude.

"I'm fine, we're done. He's a jerk. Whatever," Harley said, demonstrating her distaste for the said man.

"You will sneak into Gotham, you'll rendezvous with a power broker who will set you up to break in. This is as off the grid as it gets, so let's keep the body count to a minimum," she made her stipulations clear. "Deadshot! Rubber bullets only."

"What about the Bat?" the marksman, asked putting everyone on edge. They all knew how troublesome dealing with Batman was.

"He has his hands full in another case," Waller answered unworried. "In fact, we work it right, we might be able to take advantage of him," she informed them as she walked out of the metal room. "Now be

good convicts, everyone. Don't make me blow you up." The woman gave them a sardonic smile. "I'm clear. Gas them!"

Then the door closed and gas filled the room making everyone loss consciousness. Well, everyone except one…

As Amanda Waller walked down the hallway to prepare for the mission, a small clap caught her by surprise. "Who's there? SECURITY!"

"There's no need for that, Ms. Waller. You can use your whatchamacallit and blow my head off like you said," Peacock said with a grin.

"How did…" She wanted to ask but she quickly pulled out the detonator. "I told you I'll kill you if you disobeyed orders." She might not know how she managed to sneak out of the room, but she couldn't take any chances. "Goodbye, Peacock!" Waller then activated the nanobomb.

"Goodbye, Ms Waller!" Peacock said smiling without an ounce of fear. Then the bomb started bleeping… right behind Waller's neck. "So that's where I put my bomb!"

"What?" Amanda didn't have time to do anything else before her own head was blown to pieces.

"Sorry, Ms. Waller…" Peacock apologized as she walked over to the woman's headless body and rummaged through her coat. "There's a lot of stuff I want to do in this Loop instead of playing Suicide Squad with you and the others…" Like trying to steal the man of steel's underoos. "But next time, I'll gladly play with you, heck I'll even let you blow up my head too." That was a fair deal, wasn't it? "This may sound weird from the person who killed you, but I kinda like you. A strong independent woman who doesn't take crap from anyone and isn't scared of being in the presence of seven homicidal maniacs… you're an inspiration!" Peacock kept looking after she found what she

was looking for. "Lucky! Now I have to go before security comes… but don't you worry I'll make sure the Squad fulfills the mission, no matter what. I owe you at least that."

Standing back up, Peacock then walked to one of the walls and opened a dark cartoony hole to teleport out of there. "See ya later Ms. Waller. I can't wait to play with you next Loop!" And with that Peacock walked into the hole and disappeared.

"Hey, Miss Waller… How you doing?" Peacock said as she neared and unmarked grave she herself had made for the woman since she knew the government probably disposed of Waller's body in some shady manner and the woman didn't get the burial she deserved. "I just wanted to come and apologize once more for what I did…" Peacock honestly felt terrible. "I didn't know how important you were for the stability of this place…"

Ever since the incident with the bomb, other people were put in charge of all the operations Amanda was involved in. And in Peacock's honest opinion they sucked at their jobs. "I realize now how you alone were able to keep the government's secret operations running as smooth as possible." Heck, there had been several outbreaks and international incidents that wouldn't have happened if Amanda Waller was here.

"I've been debating how I could make it up to you, Ms. Waller," Peacock said while scratching the back of her head. "At first I thought I should do something dramatic like blow up my head after a heartfelt speech…" she said as she put a gun and pressed it against her temple. "But, suicide is the coward's way out…" She put the gun away. "Not to mention I promised I would let you blow up my head next time." That woman should have the satisfaction of seeing a crippled 13-year-old girl's head explode in a shower of gore.

"So I decided to do something else!" Peacock declared with a grin. "Amanda 'the Wall' Waller shall live again!"

Then in a flash, the 13-year-old red-head became a 40-year old black woman. "Don't you worry Amanda; I won't play pranks using your image or act all sassy like Madea." No, that she would leave that for when Waller was alive again so she could appreciate it. "Although I will berate Batman and put him in his place like only you can." Peacock couldn't wait for that. "As for my alibi, I'll just say I faked my own death to weed out some mole or traitor from our ranks."

Peacock/Waller placed a bouquet of flowers on the unmarked grave. "You might not be proud of all the things you had to do for your country and the world, but I know that you would do it all over again. Because that's the kind of woman you are Amanda." As Peacock turned around to walk away, she stopped for a second and turned her head around. "People quit, people die, including you of all people, but I can still guarantee you one thing - the Squad will go on."

6.20 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Attack on Titan]

"My, my, what a dreadful world I find myself in," Eliza, celebrity diva and Parasite Host for Sekhmet, said as she looked around the surrounding area. "I wonder if I'll find something worthy of eating."

Ever since she began Looping, she had taken this as an opportunity to 'expand her horizons', discover exciting new things, view beautiful places, and met exotic creatures to eat them. Sure, people took an exception of her feeding, but what they ignored was that she couldn't control herself. She needed to consume blood for her to keep on living, to keep looking this young and healthy.

"Hm. They treat me like a monster." Heck, everyone kept telling her she was just Dio Brando in female form. "Mh…Dio-Darling, I miss you so." She didn't mind the comparison since Dio was such a

beautiful man, with a body sculpted by the gods themselves and a charm that surpassed the devil itself. "I can't wait to meet you again…" Despite her inclination towards him, Eliza knew that Dio was a man of insatiable ambitions while she just practiced Hedonism religiously; meaning that both of their natures prevented them from having something more than what they had; 'Friends' with 'benefits' without necessarily being 'Friends'.

"But enough thinking about my stress reliever', I need to know where I am." Or see if they were other Loopers that would spoil her fun. It seemed that her name had been passed around and Loopers had been expecting her, ready to put her down. Luckily for her, the Multiverse was big enough that there were people who still weren't privy of her identity.

"Mm… grassy plains and lots of trees as far as I can see…" Meaning she had to walk by herself. "Mou… Why can't Albus and Horace be here with me? They could carry me around," Eliza complained while pouting. Only plebeians walked towards they wanted to go; she was a Queen, she should be carried by those beneath her. "Once again I'm forced to endure such woes."

Suddenly Eliza felt how the ground beneath her started to rumble. "A tremor?" she wondered for just a second. "No. The rhythm is different, this feels like…"

Like footsteps.

Turning around she found a massive bipedal creature ten times her stature that resembled humans, except for the lack of sex organs, and the strange deformities that plagued its body. "What an ugly creature you are." Eliza turned her head disgusted by the sight of the approaching creature. "And by the looks of it, you are but a mindless beast." Her suspicions were proven by the creature lack of intelligent response. "Well, beggars can't be choosers I suppose… you are going to be my means of transport this Loop."

The creature, known by others as a Titan, kept on walking towards Eliza, not really understanding anything besides his desire to consume humans.

"I guess I'll have to train you before you can even be useful," Eliza said with disappointment, but also slight intrigue. It had seen a LONG time since she had trained a pet before. "Now, kneel!" she ordered as she lifted and then brought her hand down. The Titan who had been mindlessly walking came to a sudden stop before dropping on his knees and into the ground.

"That's lying down, but good first try," she commented before giving another order. "Now kneel!" After her command was given, the Titan moved unnaturally until it managed to kneel correctly. "Good! Now how about you give me your hand?" she asked as if talking with a dog.

The Titan, if it could be capable of intelligent thought, would've wondered why was it that his body was moving all on its own and against his own will. But since he really couldn't question anything, he let himself follow what his body dictated him to do and he offered his hand to the woman.

"Good boy," Eliza felicitated him as she hopped onto his open palm. "Now, carry me while you walk… over there!" she commanded while pointing in a random direction. "Let's hope we find civilization or something to eat, you…" Eliza trailed off for a second. "I might have to think of a name for you." Well, if he managed to last more than two weeks, she might give him one. "Now go!" And with that Eliza was carried by the massive Titan to look for some people to eat.

' *This Bloodbending sure comes in handy.'*

Compiler's commentary

6.1: Carol doesn't like horror movies.

6.2: Finally, somebody to clean up this mess!

6.3: Eliza starts to gather power...

6.4: ...aaaaaand makes a beginner's mistake. Whoops!

6.5: Sometimes it sucks to be in charge.

6.6: Come on and slam! And welcome to the jam!

6.7: These two are such narcissists that they love the parts of themselves they see in each other.

6.8: It is always important to be respectful of other cultures. Even when slaughtering mafia goons.

6.9: There are some things man was not meant to know.

6.10: It is always important to be respectful of your guests. Even when slaughtering mafia goons.

6.11: Just because you have the cards on the table doesn't mean you have a winning hand.

6.12: Well, she gets a lot of Dio comparisons, it was inevitable.

6.13: To Lovecraft, the Elder Gods were creatures of terror and horror from beyond the realms of sanity. To the admins, they're an irritating bunch of trolls.

6.14: Yeah, you thought Skullgirls had some crazy fighters?

6.15: It is always important to be respectful of driving regulations. Even when slaughtering mafia goons.

6.16: Never underestimate the power of music.

6.17: A romantic evening between two complete and total monsters.

6.18: For a time, Madoka Magica's universe effectively did not exist... but there were echoes.

6.19: It's dangerous to go alone! It's also dangerous to go with these people!

6.20: Eliza gets herself a ride.

And if you, dear reader, should wish to contribute your own snip, you are welcome to join us on the Indie Games Infinite Loops thread over on Spacebattles.

You're In Over Your Head

Sometimes, what the world needs is a hero or two to serve as an example of paragon nature. Sometimes such people can bring up everyone around them just by leading by example. Sometimes they will earn respect, accolades, and even fellowship with their decisive and rightous nature. It's rather unfortunate that this is not one of those times.

7.1 Masterweaver

Beowulf frowned at the television screen. The skullgirl had been sighted again, the reports said. But that didn't make sense. He might not have been the brightest of the bunch, but the skullgirl was only supposed to appear once every seven years, and it had been only one.

...right?

The wrestler groaned, getting up and walking over to his calendar. Which... was apparently last year's calendar. In fact, it was marked to the day he remembered seeing the reports. The day that Grendel's arm started to twitch again.

His eyes drifted over to the trophy wall. Nope, the arm wasn't moving. So... what was with the reports, exactly?

"Maybe I should call the studio... they might know what's happening. This could be a promotion of the new Annie show... somehow." He scratched his chin. "Actually, that doesn't make sense. None of the actors are in this..."

Beowulf was, in a word, stumped. True, he'd been confused many times before-he wasn't the most clever of people, he knew that-but

this time it felt less as if he couldn't figure out what to do and more like there was no direction to go. It seemed like he'd been rewound like a VHS tape, but-

...Actually, that made sense. Somebody had probably gotten one of those newfangled VHS machines, used magic on it, and now he was in a documentary of his own life. He briefly considered asking the tape watcher to let him out, but... well, he didn't know if the person who had magiced the tape was the same as the person now watching it.

"Right, if I'm in a show, I better put on a show." Beowulf pounded his fist into his palm. "And what bigger show is there than beating the Skullgirl! It's time for the Beowulf to make his comeback... again!"

Eliza was idly tearing the arms off the annoying Medici enforcer, mildly disappointed she couldn't channel her loyalty to somebody more deserving-one of the other loopers, if not herself-when a wolf-skin wearing hunky idiot turned the corner. He took one look at her partially defleshed form and frowned.

"You must be the VHS witch!"

If Eliza had not had many thousands of years of experience, she might have not been able to suppress her confusion. She tossed the girl aside, leaning on her staff idly. "That's a new one. What did I do to earn *that* title?"

The man took a very blatant wrestling stance. "You trapped me in this videotape! But you've underestimated the Wulf!"

"Wait... you're Beowulf?" The now armless girl pushed herself up. "Beowulf, you're here to-!"

Eliza knocked her out with a casual staff swing. "I'm sorry, I honestly don't know what you're talking about."

"...Oh." The man paused for a moment, but then redoubled. "Well, you're still an obvious heel! It's BEOWULF time!"

Eliza allowed herself a small smirk. "Well, this *might* be amusing..."

The fight had lasted all of five minutes. Eliza had won, of course, but somehow Beowulf had chipped one of her nails.

She'd have understood if he broke her bones, but chipping a nail? When her entire body was literally made out of tightly controlled blood? That should not have been possible!

Her surprise was hidden as she put a foot to the man's chest. "You don't know how many people would want to be in your position right now. About to feed a queen. And your blood... it burns so hot, with such passion..." A chortle escaped her lips as the man struggled feebly. "Ah, resistance. I'd tell you to give up, but I know you wouldn't listen. And the last struggles of the prey... I do enjoy them."

"This is not the end!" Beowulf spat. "You will not-"

"If you're expecting a deus ex machina, I should inform you that you are not trapped in a videotape. This is real life, you're about to die, and your banter was horribly subpar." Eliza stabbed her fingers into his neck.

"Re...wind the... tape..."

Beowulf awoke in front of his television screen, watching the reports of the Skullgirl trickle in again.

"Okay." He stood up. "The tape was rewound. I can make a better showing."

He pointed at the screen. "Look out, VHS witch! Wherever you are, I will find you!"

7.2 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Blazblue]

"Valkenhayn?"

"Yes, Milady?"

"Do you know where we currently are?" the head of the Alucard vampire clan, Rachel Alucard, asked her faithful butler.

"My apologies, but I'm afraid I do not know the answer," the tall silver-haired butler bowed to his master. "But I have noticed the absence of both of your familiars: Nago and Gii." Something that never happened before,

"Hn. There goes my seat and footrest," Rachel said. She was not really all that concerned, just slightly annoyed. "So it is safe to say something far stranger than us being 'lost' is currently a foul."

"Indeed," Valkenhayn agreed with another bow. "Shall I go and ask the locals and investigate, milady?"

"Hn. I think I will accompany you," the blond vampire said.

"Milady?"

"This place is quite refreshingly new." Something that was quite rare thanks to all the Loops she had gone through. "I believe I shall enjoy the sights this city has to offer by walking around."

"But, Milady-" he tried to object.

But Rachel was having none of it. "Hush! I don't want to hear it. I made up my mind and I want to explore this place." After so much of the same, she would even put up with walking like a plebeian just to look at something new. "Now, shall we go and see the sights?"

"Yes, as you wish, Milady."

Walking through the city, which they soon found out was called New Meridian, a place that neither of them had ever heard of before, both Rachel and Valkenhayn realized they were no longer in the world known. The sights, the sounds, the people, they were a little alien to them. Not to mention the fact that there was no trace of the Novus Orbis Librarium to be found.

"Quite the predicament we found ourselves in," Valkenhayn commented, while trying to think of an explanation why they were in this strange world.

"Indeed," Rachel said in her usual monotone, but inside she too was confused about this development. "Do we find ourselves on another planet? Are we in a different timeline? Did we jump a dimension or two? Quite frankly I'm without answer."

"What should we do, milady?"

"The only thing we can do is to find more information about this place," the vampire said as a matter of fact. "Once we do that, we can try and find a way back home." But they had to be careful, since they didn't know if the time loops were still in play or if there were any sorts of danger out there like Terumi. "But first, let's find someplace that serves tea, I am slightly parched and I want to try the local flavors of this New Meridian."

"As you wish."

As they walked around in search of a tea shop, both master and servant came upon a store with several televisions on display. Usually, Rachel would've ignored such things in favor of getting her tea, but on the screens they were showing a special announcement.

"I am Rachel Wong, reporting from the studio in our nation's capitol Canopolis," said the reporter on the screen. "Our top story today,

there have been numerous reports of Skullgirl sightings in New Meridian, leading the Canopy Military to rise the Skullgirl Alert Level to 'Mauve'. New Meridian citizens are advised to stay indoors, remain vigilant and report anything suspicious."

"Skullgirl?" Rachel repeated back, intrigued. What was a Skullgirl and why her sightings would cause the military of this nation to worry?

"Mauve Alert?" Besides her, Valkenhayn was more perplexed by the choice this place had for their color-coded alarm levels.

"This newest incarnation of the Skullgirl has yet to be identified but our sources within the NMPD say her victims seemed to be connected with the prestigious Medici Family." The report continued while showing the picture of a man with a subtitle below reading Lorenzo Medici. "Lorenzo Medici, the most prominent of this powerful clan, has withdrawn from the public spotlight and is believed to have gone into hiding." Then the picture changed and instead of Lorenzo, it showed a different portrait, probably an artist representation."Having just observed the seventh anniversary of the defeat of the previous Skullgirl, our kingdom's own Queen Nancy (Trinity Bless her soul), the appearance of a new Skullgirl is a chilling development."

"So, this Skullgirl seemed to be not just a recurring threat but also not just a single individual," Rachel commented now more intrigued by the report.

"While expected, the core of our nation is once again shaken as normalcy seemed to be returning. But we will not be defeated, and stand strong against this new enemy." The reporter stated with determination while a flag, red background with two black vertical stripes with stars on the sides and a black umbrella inside a white circle in the middle, showed beside her. "Even as this new threat has emerged, we can sleep easy tonight knowing that the Black Egrets lead by our own Princess Parasoul are here to protect us." The TV changed once again to show another picture, this time of a red-

headed lady followed behind by what looked like soldiers with full armor. "In these uncertain times, it's good to know we can all rely on the strength and leadership of our Canopy Royal Family. Good day and Goddesspeed."

"Hn. Even in this world, the leaders still rely on propaganda to make themselves look greater and far more important than what they truly are," Rachel remarked thinking back at the NOL and their actions. "Nevertheless, this report has given us quite a piece of information." Though it also brought up more questions in need of answers. "Valkenhayn!"

"Yes Milady?" the butler bowed waiting for his instructions.

"We need to know more about the Skullgirls, please retrieve information about them immediately," she commanded decisively.

"What about us finding a way to return home?" Valkenhayn asked.

"If the Skullgirl is as dangerous a threat like the special report painted her out to be, information regarding them is far more urgent," Rachel stated, focusing on what could be a new enemy. "Now go, and find me that information, meanwhile I'll look for my tea."

"I'll do as you say, Milady." And with a final bow, the butler disappeared within a black hole signaling the use of his teleportation ability. "I'll be back soon."

7.3 Skaz Wolfman

(Skullgirls)/(Dragon Ball)

–CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS!–

" *AWOOOO!* " howled the rabid fans called the Wulfpack.

As if on cue, Beowulf Awoke. "Whoa! What the hell?!" the wrestler exclaimed, even as a lifetime's worth of unfamiliar memories poured through his mind. He was in a room, and his most immediate memories told him was one of the finalists in a tournament, and currently waiting to be called back out to the arena. Flashes of other memories played out in his head; growing up in a village far to the north, near where a bunch of yahoos called the Red Ribbon Army set up a base called Muscle Tower. He remembered a kid with a tail, Goku, showing up and picking a fight with the Red Ribbons, and he remembered helping him attack Muscle Tower. He'd kept the arm of the killer android, Major Metallic, as a souvenir. They also freed a much friendlier android, simply called Android 8, who became a new member of Jingle Village. Beowulf remembered leaving his village to travel the world, building a worldwide reputation for himself as a martial artist while training to participate in…

"AND NOW, THE CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH OF THE 24TH WORLD MARTIAL ARTS TOURNAMENT!" the Announcer proclaimed to the clamoring crowd. "Coming down from the wild north, said to wield the arm of a metal monster as a weapon, it's BEEEEEEEOOOOOOOWUUUUUUUULF! And his worthy opponent, rising star of the martial arts world and champion of the Satan Castle dojo, it's HEEEEEEEEEEEERCUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUULE SAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAATAAAAAAAAAAAAAN!"

The crowd went wild. Like, absolutely *berserk* . Even in his daze, Beowulf instinctively started walking towards the sound of people screaming his name.

Soon, Beowulf found himself standing in a broad, square arena across from a big, burly man with an afro, handlebar mustache, and sideburns. He was a hairy mountain of muscles with a confident gleam in his eyes. Even so, he was about half a foot shorter than Beowulf.

"So you're the wild man who stood up to the Red Ribbon Army?" Hercule asked him rhetorically. "You've got guts, brother. I admire

that." He widened his stance and raised his arms. "Now let's give these good folks the show they came to see!"

Beowulf grinned and took his stance. "Hell yeah, man! A good show is what I'm all about, brother!"

Beowulf and Hercule charged at each other, howling at the top of their lungs. Hercule rolled forward and launched himself off the ground into a flying double-kick.

It was a super-telegraphed move and easily dodged, but that wouldn't be the stylish way of doing things. Beowulf dug in his heels and caught Hercule by his feet, and used his momentum to start swinging him around before throwing him aside. Then he took a flying leap and bodyslammed him.

Without missing a beat, Hercule clamped his arms around Beowulf and jumped back up to his feet. "Well ya sure ain't lackin' for flair, son!" he complimented before raising Beowulf over his head and slamming him down into the floor.

Beowulf expertly bounced himself off of the floor and back onto his feet, and rushed Hercule again, throwing both fists at him. Hercule jumped to the side and snapped a sidekick at Beowulf as he passed. Beowulf swept the kick aside with one arm, and raising the other one to deflect Hercule's follow-up straight jab.

With a raging howl Beowulf lunged at Hercule, who caught and suplexed him. At the same time, however, Beowulf grabbed Hercule with his legs and *counter-suplexed* him.

The combatants disengaged and broke apart from each other.

With a ferocious howl, Beowulf threw himself at Hercule again. The two exchanged punches and kicks, grapples and counters, all while the Announcer seemingly lost his mind on behalf of the cheering audience.

"MY GOODNESS, JUST LOOK AT THE WAY THESE TITANIC MEN HAMMER AWAY AT EACH OTHER! ANY LESSER MAN WOULD BE MUSH ON THE INSIDE TAKE THOSE HITS! ANY LESSER MAN WOULD BREAK HIS ARM *GIVING* THESE HITS! WHAT VIGOR! WHAT SPEED!"

At first, Hercule and Beowulf seemed evenly matched. Then, to Beowulf's disbelief, Hercule was suddenly hitting him more often (though his hits weren't landing as heavily as before) and taking his hits less often. "I can already tell you're as fine a brawler as anyone I've scrapped with in a while," Hercule complimented as he was, by now, evading every single strike Beowulf was throwing by mere millimeters. "In another life, you could'a given me a helluva run for my prize money, haha!"

Beowulf took a step in and put all his weight and power into a right jab, right into the other man's chest; there was no way he could step backwards or to the side fast enough to avoid him this time…

Then Hercule grabbed his wrist and wrenched his arm to the side, hard enough to turn his whole body aside. He did it so fast it appeared as though he had merely slapped Beowulf's fist away. Before Beowulf could react, Hercule kicked his feet out from under him and swung him up into the air, then slapped him back down into the ground.

Hercule took a step back and folded his arms. "Ya got guts, brother, and ya got talent. But have ya got the *heart* of a champion?"

Beowulf jumped up to his feet and took a stance. "Buddy, every *muscle* in my body is heart!" he rejoined, "Which means the sports reporters can call what I'm about to do to you a *heart-beating* !"

"SOUNDS LIKE A PLAN TA ME!" Hercule roared back with a wild grin.

Screaming at the top of their lungs, the two men went at it again. The Announcer hawked, "HEAVENS ABOVE, LADIES AND

GENTLEMEN, THIS IS PHENOMENAL! HERCULE SMACKED BEOWULF INTO THE GROUND SO HARD I FELT THE BLOW IN THE PIT OF MY OWN STOMACH! AND OUR WILD MAN FROM THE NORTH SNAPPED RIGHT BACK AS IF HE WERE A HUMAN RUBBERBAND! SELDOM HAVE I EVER SEEN A MAN BOUNCE BACK SO QUICKLY FROM SO SOLID A BLOW! I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL REMINDED OF THE SUPERHUMAN ENDURANCE AND FORTITUDE DISPLAYED BY THE COURAGEOUS YOUNG WARRIOR, SON GOKU, WHO HEROICALLY BESTED THE WICKED PICCOLO JR. IN THE LAST WORLD MARTIAL ARTS TOURNAMENT ELEVEN YEARS AGO, IN THIS ARENA'S PREDECESSOR!"

At the last second, just before they would have collided, Hercule suddenly jumped backwards, making Beowulf stumble. Then he tucked his head down and rushed forward, shoulder-checking Beowulf in the stomach and knocking the wind out of him. Hercule swung up with both fists, launching him into the air.

Hercule jumped up after him, but Beowulf managed to orient himself in midair and block Hercules next punch. He kicked against Hercule, pushing them both apart, and landed on his feet.

Riiiight on the edge of the ring. The alien set of new memories he had, which he had to assume were fake but still felt just as real as all his 'normal' memories, reminded Beowulf that if he fell out of the ring, he'd lose the match instantly. For a split second, Beowulf got lost in processing the new memories.

Then he noticed Hercule charging straight at him, and jumped to the side. Hercule zipped right over to him with blinding speed and kicked Beowulf in the side, launching him *away* from the edge.

After a few more minutes of skirmishing, it became apparent to Beowulf that his newest opponent was on another level. He could dodge, block, or even parry any of Beowulf's attacks without even looking at him, sometimes moving so fast that he seemed to disappear entirely, if only for an instant. Any hits Beowulf did land,

now—no, *every* hit he had landed this whole fight, Beowulf realized, had been a freebie. Not to mention, Beowulf didn't have The Hurting, or Grendel's arm, or his exploding microphones. Even the arm of the machine man he had fought in his memories, which he did have, he didn't have *on* him, because weapons weren't allowed in these fights.

' *In short, there's no way I'm beating this guy unless he takes a dive…ah well, it's been a long damn time, but it ain't like I've never jobbed before,'* Beowulf realized as Hercule punted him halfway across the ring, again. ' *BUT WHATEVER! Jobber or winner, Beowulf fights his guts out for his fans! Even when he loses, he does it with all his heart and soul, and leaves it all out on the canvas!'*

Beowulf flipped over midair and landed on his feet, then took a howling charge at him. "AROO READY?!" he roared.

" *IT'S WULFAMANIA TIME!* " the Wulfpack in the stands roared back.

' *Glad to know some things never change,'* Beowulf thought with a smirk.

"Alright! C'mon, big guy, hit me with your *best shot!* " Hercule called to him. He didn't seem interested in evading, this time; he dug in his heels and raised his arms in a defensive stance.

Just five feet away from Hercule, Beowulf kicked off the ground and took a flying lunge at him, his arm drawn way back.

"ONE! TWENTY! INCH! PYTHON!" Beowulf bellowed as he threw his fist at Hercule's face. Along with it, he threw the full weight of everything he felt in a fight.

The roar of the crowd in his ears, the cheers *and* the jeers.

The heat in his muscles, fire in his belly and in his blood.

The primal satisfaction of sinking his knuckles into someone else's meat, like a wolf sinking teeth into its prey.

The exhilaration, the anticipation, the wild tempo of his own heart, the hunger for fame and adoration, because if the crowds went wild for Beowulf, it meant he was making them happy. Giving them someone to admire. Giving them something to get *hyped* over. That was what Beowulf was all about. That was why he fought.

For the hype.

This feeling was always in Beowulf's heart when he did the big finish, and right now he tried to squeeze that whole feeling into the half-inch between his two leading knuckles. His only regret was that he didn't have Grendel's (or Major Metallitron's) arm to do this.

Then, much to Beowulf's surprise, *a massive arm made of light exploded out from his fist,* sending Hercule flying backwards. Through his astonishment, Beowulf noted that the spectral arm looked a heck of a lot Grendel's.

"The…the hell?" Beowulf gasped. Then he sank to his knees. The arm made of energy was gone, leaving behind only spots in Beowulf's eyes. Hercule was standing *just* on the edge of the ring, but he wasn't moving any further back than that. There were two ways to lose this fight, Beowulf recalled (aside from giving up or getting caught cheating). One was by getting knocked out of the ring, the other was being knocked down long enough for the ref to count to ten.

Beowulf willed Hercule to fall backwards, or just to stumble back another inch, with every ounce of his will. At the same time, he valiantly struggled to resist getting any closer to the ground than he already was. Unfortunately, right about now, his body felt like lead and gravity felt stronger than a whole army of Grendel's Mom. Whatever he had just done, it had drained him completely.

Inexorably, Beowulf fell forward, hitting the ground face first. The ref started counting, but Beowulf never heard him say "Three".

Several days later, Beowulf was standing in front of the recently purchased mansion of the new World Martial Arts Champion, Hercule Satan. The very man who Beowulf had lost to had invited him over; said they needed to 'have a talk'. "Man, this really greases the old 'video tape' theory. Time rewinding doesn't explain *this…* unless there's more than one tape, and somehow I got spliced into someone else's tape between rewinds? Nah, that doesn't make any sense…" he muttered to himself, not for the first time since he had 'came to his senses' as it were just before the match. He was just waiting for someone to answer the door, and any time he had been idle for even a moment the last few days, his mind couldn't help but keep running on a hamster wheel over this mystery.

The door opened, answered by a little girl. Beowulf wasn't too great with kids' ages, but he guessed she was around Annie's age, or younger. *'Well, no, duh. I'M younger than Annie…you know what I mean, Me!'*

"Oh, hey wolf guy," young Videl Satan greeted him, "C'mon in, Dad's waiting for you."

She led Beowulf into the house, to a gym room where Hercule was doing upside-down curls. "Beowulf! Glad you came by," said Hercule when he noticed then, before flipping down from the bar. Videl brought him a towel and a water bottle, and he ruffled her hair with a big dopey grin. He then led Beowulf to an outdoor swimming pool.

"Somehow, I get the feeling you didn't invite me over for a drink, Champ," said Beowulf, folding his arms.

"Not too dumb for a big guy, ain'tcha?" Hercule shot back as he sat down on a diving board. "Well, neither am I. Couldn't help noticing you were a *very* different fighter, until our match. The Beowulf who fought his way to the final bout fought like a real wild man, with all

the earmarks of a self-taught martial artist. But when we fought, you were a lot more like a wrestler. More than that, it was like you'd learned two different ways of fighting and couldn't recall which one was right. All that on top of you not being Jewel."

"Jewel?"

"The fella I usually have to fight to win this year's World Martial Arts Tournament," Hercule explained, "Seems you took his place this go-around. To tell the plain truth, if it weren't for you Replacing someone, I might not have paid enough attention to you to notice the subtle signs of someone Waking Up to their first Loop in someone else's Branch."

It took Beowulf a full two minutes to process what Hercule had just said, going over the odd significance he had placed on certain, otherwise innocuous words. Particularly, the implications of that first sentence. For his part, Hercule patiently watched him think.

Then it clicked.

"You've been getting rewound too?!" Beowulf exclaimed. "I really am in someone else's VHS tape! How'd it happen though?"

Hercule blinked. "VHS… uhh, seems you haven't gotten what's what explained to ya yet. Well, no problem!" Hercule jumped up and started flexing. "Besides being the world champ for thousands of years and peerless, fearless defender of humanity, Mr. Satan is also a world-class teacher! I knew right off that I liked the cut of your jib, Beowulf. Mark my words, by the end of the day, we'll have you up to snuff on what the Loops are all about!"

"AWESOME! But hey, first, you got any idea how I made that huge Grendel arm appear out of nowhere?"

7.4 MaracaRin

Ever since the Skullgirl was defeated by Parasoul, she had known that one day she would have her life stripped away. Her wish was not pure of heart. She trained her younger sister, in hopes that Umbrella would be strong enough to defeat her once the Skull Heart takes over. Thus she crept ever closer to madness.

Except...

Something felt... wrong. Symptoms of the Skull Heart's influence were not uncommon at all, and yet she hadn't felt any for a while. What's more, Umbrella acted surprised to start training today. It was almost like...

Parasoul checked the nearby calendars.

...she had gone back in time.

But surely that wasn't possible, right? Something straight out of an Annie of the Stars episode, or something, but not reality...

The princess, seemingly unbound by time, shook her head. If this had truly occurred, she should make the most of it.

Her sister would be ready.

Almost a year later...

"So whaddya wanna do, toots?" Peacock asked her undead girlfriend. "Maybe kill some mafia goons?"

"Patricia, I believe we wiped out the Medicis months ago," Marie responded, sipping her tea. "Besides, the Loop ends in less than an hour. It would be pointless."

The cyborg rolled all six of her eyes. "Well, I jus-"

"You!"

A voice familiar to the entire kingdom rang out. All the surrounding people turned to stare at the new arrival. Except the two loopers, of course, since things like this weren't entirely unusual. It wasn't until the two princesses marched up to the pair that they took notice.

"To what do I owe the pleasure, your highnesses?" Marie politely asked.

"Big sis, you were right. I can definitely feel Mom on her," the younger princess said to the elder, ignoring Marie's question.

"Well, I suppose that makes this easier. Stand back, Umbrella," Parasoul twirled Kreig around, preparing for a fight. "This time, I won't let you influence her, Skullgirl!"

Peacock stood up. "Listen here lady, I'm not just gonna letcha attack her. If you got some beef with her, you gotta go through... me..." A lightbulb appeared above the cyborg's head. "Hang on, 'this time'? Like it's happened before?"

"What would you know about that?" the princess responded aggressively.

The odd couple looked at each other, then nodded. "Princess Parasoul Renoir, I believe we have some things to discuss. Unfortunately, we do not have much time left, I'm afraid." The Skullgirl sighed. "For now, remember that the next time you see us, say you are feeling loopy. We will explain everything then."

"Wha- what do you mean, not much time left? Why should I trust you, Skullgirl?" Parasoul brandished her weapon.

Marie simply chuckled. "You'll learn to trust me in time."

Parasoul woke up.

She needed to find the Skullgirl again, and that other girl as well.

She needed answers.

7.2 (con't) XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Blazblue]

Half an hour later, Rachel was sitting in a local pastry shop that also served tea. Although places like this would usually be beneath her, the vampire was insistent on trying and tasting the local flavors of New Meridian. While she enjoyed her tea made from a herb that she never heard before, Rachel was also enjoying a small piece of strawberry cake. It wasn't Mil crêpe, but it was satisfactory enough. "I wonder what is taking Valkenhayn so long." He would usually complete his errands in a more timely manner...

Suddenly a black hole appeared next to her alongside Valkenhayn. "Ha, Valkenhayn. I was wondering what was taking you so long, I was about to get impatient."

"Please excuse my lateness, Milady," Valkenhayn apologized. "I was having trouble getting precise information about the Skullgirl. But I managed to find this." The butler took out a colorful book and presented it to his master.

"Valkenhayn."

"Yes, Milady?"

"This is a children's storybook," Rachel pointed out looking at her butler expectantly waiting for a satisfactory answer that could explain this.

"Indeed. As I said, I was having trouble locating exact information since most people don't like to bring up Skullgirls informal conversation," Valkenhayn explained. "So I decided to look for books about the topic."

"And this was the best you could come up with?" Rachel was frankly surprised by the quality of his findings. Usually he was better than this.

"I also found this history book," he said as he pulled out a THICK and quite heavy book. "It elaborates more and talks about great length about the Skullgirls and their impact through history, but I figured that a more concise and light read would be appropriate, especially since the most important aspects of the Skullgirls are also detailed in the storybook."

"Well… I suppose I can skim the storybook first, since you bothered yourself with it." That and also the other book looked far more boring.

"Do you want me to read it for you?" Valkenhayn asked earnestly.

"Hush. I'm no child. I am capable of reading it for myself." Besides, it was more embarrassing having a storybook read to her than reading it on her own. "Let's see…"

"The Legend of the SkullHeart."

' *A long, long time ago, before anyone can remember, a powerful mystical artifact appeared upon this world. Because of its gloomy appearance, it was called the SkullHeart.*

No one knows why but the SkullHeart has strange and unknown powers and can grant the wish of any girl or woman that wish upon it. Only girls and women can get their wish granted. And the wish can be anything their heart desires.

But nothing that good comes without a price. If the woman who wishes upon the heart doesn't have a pure heart herself, then the SkullHeart will transform the woman into a monster called the SkullGirl.

The Skullgirl is a monster of destruction that preys upon anything and anyone around them.

Luckily there had been many Heroes who had battled the Skullgirl and had restored peace to the world by destroying the SkullHeart.

But the Skullheart is not easily defeated, since every time it is destroyed, after seven years it would reappear on the world once more, waiting for another woman to make a wish. Waiting to make another Skullgirl.'

"That was… an interesting read," Rachel said as she closed the book. "A little amateurish, but informative nonetheless." Although it didn't mention what sort of abilities and powers the Skullgirl possessed, but that was to be expected from a children's book.

"The history book goes in more detail stating that one of the powers of the Skullgirl is to give life to the dead to create an undead army under her complete control," Valkenhayn informed her, having read the book beforehand.

"Well, I guess it is clear what we have to do, isn't it Valkenhayn?" Rachel said with a knowing tone. "Valkenhayn, we are going to hunt this Skullgirl down and get ourselves a wish."

"Yes, Milady." The butler bowed in acknowledgment. "But aren't you worried about the curse of the Heart?"

"Nonsense! My heart is pure enough," the blond vampire affirmed. There was no way it could transform her into a Skullgirl. "Besides, this could be our only chance to get back to our world." That is, if the Heart was as powerful as the book claimed it to be. "There is nothing that can stop me from getting my wish."

Meanwhile, inside the Grand Cathedral, a blond nun was kneeling near the altar all alone with her hands in from of her in the sign of prayer.

"Yes, Masters! Your will shall be done," the nun said before finishing her prayer and standing up. "Come and meet your fate, Rachel

Alucard."

7.5 Masterweaver

"You're looping?!"

"Yes, that's what-"

"MARIE! BEOWULF IS LOOPING!"

The skullgirl smiled gently at the cyborg's reaction. "Yes, Patricia, I heard. She's a big fan," she explained.

"What, like you ain't?"

"Mmm... I'm a fan of the sport, not necessarily of individual wrestlers. No offense."

Beowulf chuckled. "None taken. I've met plenty of fans like that." He frowned for a moment. "Never thought the Skullgirl would be one..."

"Beneath our corruption and general bloodlust we are just ordinary girls," Marie pointed out. "Incidentally, if I'm not Awake, killing me and destroying the skullheart is entirely the right thing to do."

"Oh. Alright then-"

Peacock jumped between them, holding an armload of Beowulf merch. And with her long arms, that was saying something. "Can I get your autograph on all of this?!"

7.6 XeroM52

Welcome to the Loops Your Highness!

That's what the banner said over the heads of everyone celebrating this occasion. Something that Parasoul Renoir, crowned princess of the Canopy Kingdom, wasn't exactly comfortable about.

"So, that's it? We just have to carry on with our lives constantly repeating over and over again?" the princess asked the attendees who were: 3 Anti-Skullgirl human weapons, an ex-retired Wrestling Champion, and a Skullgirl.

If this wasn't the set-up for a crappy bar joke she didn't know what it was. It didn't help that they rented a bar for this private celebration.

"Pretty much! Although some of us seemed to Loop more than others," Ben Birdland, now going with the name Big Band, explained. "And when we do Loop we usually try to make our lives a little less… not good," he finished lamely, not wanting to cuss in front of the princess.

"And what he means by that, it's that we murder some of those bastards Medici and rogue elements of the ASG unit," Peacock said, not really having the same tact as the older ASG unit.

Beside Big Band, Carol also known as the Painwheel, nodded in agreement. "Every time I loop I make sure to kill that bastard Brain Drain and that accursed nurse Valentine!" No matter how much time it passed, she would never forgive what they did to her.

"But not all of us are about murder," Beowulf tried to reassure the princess. "I for example, just return to the ring if there are worthy opponents on the roster. And when there are none I just go around picking up fights with strangers."

"For Godessess' sake! Do any of you do something that doesn't involve violence or destroying my kingdom?" she asked, concerned only to receive blank looks from everyone on the table. "For the love of the Trinity!" She sighed in frustration. *'I'm surrounded by crazies.'*

"Your Highness… now that you bring up the Trinity," Marie, the current Skullgirl, said to her. Something that Parasoul couldn't wrap her head around. Her talking with the Skullgirl without wanting to kill one another.

"What? Are you going to tell me they aren't real?" Parasoul said cynically. She already had her view of the world turn upside down, why not add crisis of faith on top of it all?

"No, they are in fact real," Marie confirmed. "And that is a problem!"

"Why? They are our beloved goddesses that created our world!" Parasoul said, almost reciting from the holy book of the Trinity.

"They may have created the world... but they also created the Skullheart," Marie revealed.

The princess was shocked to the core. "But-"

"Not only that, they are planning something… probably to destroy our entire world and erase our existence!" Marie dropped the other bombshell.

"How! Why? When? How do we stop this?" Parasoul asked frantically. The idea of the world ending by the hands of the three goddesses was a terrifying prospect.

"Why and how we don't know exactly, but I suspect it has to be related to the SkullHeart," Marie answered honestly. "But I can tell you when… when the Loops end," she said ominously. "Since Yggdrasil resets things back to the way they were, trying to destroy the world during the Loops is just a waste of time. So, for now, they are biding their time."

The atmosphere at the table turned a little somber, but Parasoul didn't let that stop her from asking. "What shall we do then?"

"That is something we cannot agree upon," Beowulf commented. "Some of us are fine with doing nothing, and let the universe takes its course."

"How can you say that?" The princess said, alarmed. "Don't you have any fighting spirit?"

"I got plenty of that, Princess," Beowulf explained "It's just… that these Loops had been going on for eons now, and they will continue for eons. And when they finally come to an end so should our lives. I mean, before anyone of us started Looping, we were all aware of our own mortality. Why would this be any different?" Next to him, Big Band nodded agreeing with Beowulf.

"I suggested that we all amass power so when the time finally comes, we all ascend into Gods and fight the Trinity on their own turf," Peacock informed of her brilliant plan.

"But that plan could lead to the destruction of our entire universe which the winners would have to recreate. Meaning that the Trinity's plan would still be realized," Marie pointed out. "Not to mention we would be forced to watch over this new world for all eternity. Who knows if we will just end up repeating the actions of the Trinity and destroy countless worlds because we grew bored of them?"

"The other option…" Carol began nervously. "My idea was to make sure the Loops would never end."

This garnered the attention of the Princess. "What do you mean by that?"

"I… I don't like this world," Carol confessed. "After all the bad things that happened and still happens every day, I can't fault the trinity for wanting to destroy it. But I found out that there are other worlds out there. Better and worse than this one, but with the Loops, no matter what happens we can always recover and we can always have fun with the other loopers."

"So what do you think Princess?" Peacock asked for Parasoul's opinion on the matter.

"It is all too much for me," she said, almost trembling. "I am still too new at this."

"Again, although this is hanging over our heads, it would take eons and countless Loops before the end of the Loops becomes a reality," Big Band pointed out. "If there is one thing we have on our side, it's time."

Then the entire table fell into an uncomfortable silence.

"Man, this got depressing all of the sudden," Peacock said breaking the silence that lasted for an entire minute. "Let's all share some stories about the Loops we visited so the Princess here knows what to expect!" she proposed, which brought back some cheer to the rest of them.

"Yes, let's… Who goes first?" Beowulf asked.

"Duh. I of course!" Peacock said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. "Let me tell you about my first weird variant Loop…"

"Wait a second! If we are all here... where is Eliza?" Marie said after a few rounds of stories.

[On the other side of the world]

Eliza was submerged in a hot tub, relaxing all of her aching muscles.

"I don't care if I die of hunger! After that last Loop, I won't step outside of this tub." It seemed that her name was slowly making its way around the Loops and people started attacking her whenever she went. "The life of a Diva is never easy!" she said as she drank an energy drink.

7.2 (con't) XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Blazblue]

"My, what a charming little church," Rachel Alucard said as she laid eye upon the Grand Cathedral of the Trinity, one of the most impressive size and well-kept buildings in all of the Canopy Kingdom. Of course, the blond vampire was the only one that could dismiss such great architectural design as a 'charming little church.' "It is slightly ironic that a monstrous being of destruction would hide underneath a Temple of God." Then again the Black Beast resided within Ragna.

"Indeed. Although I think these people revere a Trinity of Goddesses instead of one singular god," Valkenhayn clarified to his master. It would do no good if by accident the master would commit a faux pas because he failed to mention this detail.

"Trio of Goddesses? Just them?" Rachel asked, slightly surprised while Valkenhayn nodded in affirmation. "So a religion based on Matriarchal beliefs, I don't know if to call that progressive or really archaic." Though an interesting bit of trivia; Rachel had no more time to lose just standing outside the cathedral. "Come Valkenhayn, let us enter this place and acquire what we came looking for."

"Yes, Milady." Valkenhayn bowed before walking towards the entrance of the temple and opened the door for his master. "Do watch your step inside, Madam Rachel."

"Thank you kindly," the blond vampire said as she stepped inside the church. "My! What an impressive decor."

The inside of the Grand Cathedral resembled a traditional Catholic church, with white marble walls, large stained glass windows, and ornate frescoes. But the most eye-catching thing of it all, besides the giant stained glass windows depicting what Rachel assumed were the Three Goddesses, was the imposing large statue that dwarfed

them all. If the vampire had to guess, she would say that the statue, which showed the Three Goddesses in one single body representing the unity of the Trinity, was around 15 to 20 times the size of a regular sized man.

"Certainly, it is quite striking," Valkenhayn agreed as he too admired the décor of the cathedral. It was something he definitely had never seen before.

"The awe-inspiring glory of the Trinity is indeed a privileged sight to behold," a voice that resounded all over the empty walls of the church said startling the two of them. "And those who worship the Holy Trinity will be blessed in this life and the other," the voice said as the owner revealed itself to them, in the form of a blue habit wearing young nun. "Welcome to the House of the Trinity."

"Greetings Sister," Valkenhayn greeted with a respectful bow. "Sorry for coming this late, I hope we aren't intruding."

"For all of those who seek the forgiveness and compassion of the Trinity, the doors of this Cathedral are always opened," the nun informed them politely. "Especially if those people are expected guests."

"Expected guests…?" Rachel repeated back, intrigued by the sister's words. "Are you saying you were waiting for us?"

"Correct." The nun nodded. "I have been waiting for your arrival, Rachel Alucard." Then the nun opened her eyes revealing an unnatural red void inside of them. "You are a possessor of an incredibly strong soul; you are a perfect candidate…"

"Perfect candidate? Candidate for what exactly?" Really now, she really hated when people spoke in riddles instead of straight answers. And no, the irony of that statement didn't escape her either.

"The Skullgirl is waiting for you… down below…" The inhuman nun pointed towards a large door behind the main altar. "If you really are

worth it then taking the Heart for yourself should be easy…"

"You'll find that I far surpass any of your measly expectations. I shall claim the heart and have my wish granted." And there was nothing that could stop her from getting what she wanted. "Valkenhayn! Let's go and find the Skullgirl."

"Sorry, but I'm afraid your pet shall remain up here," the nun forbid sternly. "You may proceed alone."

"You shall excuse me, sister. But I don't play by anyone's rules if I could help it," Rachel declared un-amused. "Valkenhayn, please take care of the sister for me."

"As you wish, Milady." The butler bowed before turning to the nun. "I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I'll have to deal with you." He wasn't exactly looking forward to beating up a nun, but he had to comply with his master's orders.

"No need to apologize, we are both faithful servants and must abide by our Masters' desires," the nun said as she stood too relaxed for an imminent confrontation.

"Good to see we are on the same page," Valkenhayn said as she assumed his battle stance. "Now prepare yourself, because you are about to fight a monster."

"To fight is futile. Aeon has foretold my victory…" the nun replied without concern, "While there is still time… Repent, for your death is nigh..."

And with the wheel of fate turning, two souls were fiercely entangled, ready to unleash their fury. Both Monsters; One a man, who lived only to fulfill his master's wishes; the other, a woman veiled in mystery who if the devotion for her masters is power, then no one is stronger.

The Time of Retribution is Now! Time to Decide the Destiny!

Valekenhyn rushed forward faster than the human eye could follow and powerful roundhouse kick, with his leg and feet transformed into that of a wolf's paw and claw, showing part of his true nature as a lycanthrope. "Fall before me!" he shouted as his feet made impact. "What?!" Despite the speed and strength behind his attack, it was all for naught for his opponent had caught his blow before it could make any damage.

But what surprised the butler the most was the hand that caught his attack. "Is that…?"

"Useless," the nun commented with her hand holding the failed attack also transformed into a wolf's paw and claw. "Now Begone!" With even greater speed and strength, the nun returned the exact same kick to the butler, which sent him careening back down the marble floor.

"What…?!" Valekenhyn was completely confused by it all. How was it possible for this nun to be able to replicate his exact same attack he used against her? "How did you…?"

"Soon you'll see why I am called Double!" the nun said as she seemingly transformed into an exact copy of Valekenhyn. "Confess your sins." said the Doppelganger with the exact same voice, tone, and intonation Valekenhyn used when saying the exact same line. When fighting Terumi.

' *Not only she is an exact copy, she knows things only I should've known,'* Valekenhyn thought, alarmed as he stood up. *'Her ability is far beyond just mere copying.'* And that made Double extremely dangerous if she were to copy his master's abilities. "Madame Rachel, I'm afraid this opponent is far stronger than I initially believed," he said apologetically while brushing off any dirt that may have clung to him. "This fight might take a while so I humbly ask you to please carry on to the path towards the Skullgirl without me," he indicated, not showing any sign of worry so that he wouldn't alarm his master.

"Very well, I shall proceed," Rachel answered, knowing what Valekenhyn was trying to do. "I'll fight the Skullgirl, but if you don't come down before I'm finished with her, I'll… I'll think of a severe punishment for your lateness."

"Do not worry yourself with me, Milady," he said reassuringly. "I'll be there on time and with a cup of master's favorite tea ready for the celebration of your victory."

"Don't make me wait, Valekenhyn." And with that, Rachel walked away and towards the door that led to where the Skullgirl was waiting.

After she was finally gone, Valekenhyn turned towards his copy and sneered. "Best I do what Milady says, and finish you off!" he said.

His copy smirked. "Are you prepared…to confront a monster?" DoubleValekenhyn said as it readied himself for another go.

"My, what a dreadful place," Rachel commented as she made her way down the stairs and into the catacombs below the church were body after decayed body were sorted in communal graves. When the vampire finally reached the last step she found herself looking at a lonely figure emanating some sort of spectral light that illuminated the surroundings. "So you are the so-called Skullgirl," Rachel said, sounding unimpressed. "Frankly I am quite underwhelmed. I was expecting something… different." Rachel wasn't all impressed by the small white haired girl dressed as a maid. "You don't look like a being of destruction the stories foretold."

"Indeed, I am the Skullgirl," the maid responded with a very cold tone. "So tell me, child, What are you doing here?"

"Child?" Rachel repeated slightly offended more so for the condescending tone the Skullgirl had use than for the name itself. "I'll have you know that I am not a mere child. I am Rachel Alucard, head of the Alucard Vampire Clan."

"Forgive my presumptions, Madam Alucard." The Skullgirl bowed in an apologetic manner. "If I had known I was talking to an Elderly Woman I would've been more respectful."

"Elderly!? Why you-" the vampire said, getting irritated. "You are but a dusty maid and a child, nothing else."

"Madam Alucard! It is unbecoming of a woman your age to be throwing petty insults like a youngling," Marie reprimanded like any good maid would do to a misbehaving master. "Please try to act your age."

"Silence you," Rachel answered. She was really ticked off, almost as if she was dealing with that pain in the neck Terumi. "I'm a noble and you are the help, so why don't you make yourself useful and give me the Heart."

"Rachel Alucard…" The little humor that had been in the Skullgirl's voice before, had instantly vanished making her sound much more detached. "I cannot and will not hand over the Heart to you or anyone else," she said solemnly. "Besides, even if you manage to wrestle it away from me, are you ready to gamble your life for a wish?"

"The heart is the only way for us to get the answers we need," Rachel explained. "And unlike you, I will not succumb to the curse of the SkullHeart, for my Heart is pure enough."

"…" The maid remained silent, almost as if she was reluctantly digesting the words the vampire just said if the expression on her face was any indication. "Bloody… Marie…"

"What was that?"

"My name is Marie Korbel, The Skullgirl known as the Bloody Marie!" Marie introduced herself with a bit of hostility in her voice. "If you want the Heart so badly, you better be prepared to fight for it. Get ready, for you have awakened me and my anger."

"I am not afraid of you," Rachel rightfully declared without hesitation.

"Come, Rachel Alucard, and face the power of a Skullgirl!"

7.7 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Pheonix Wright]

In the Canopian Criminal Justice System, there are two separate but equally important groups: the police and prosecutors who apprehend and trial the offenders and the idiotic defendants who take up the courts time with their self-serving bladder.

These are their stories.

Municipal Court Part 8

Tuesday, January 30th

Today was a day like no other, because today was the day that Peacock finally faced court for one of the most heinous crimes that she had ever committed. The Gallery was full not because this case was infamous, but because the crowned ruler of the Kingdom, Princess Parasoul, had come to the proceedings. But she wasn't the only Local Looper to come, the rest of them had also come to watch the trial's outcome, not out of concern for Peacock but out of morbid curiosity.

"So she hits the switch and sent a million bolts of electricity to the leprechaun's pot of gold! There were smoke and cool sparks everywhere and the little bugger's head went kaboom! But, later she finds out that that was a Lepre-clone and the real Leprechaun…"

"Miss Peacock!" the judge presiding over this case interrupted Peacock's blabbering while walking from one side to the other in front of his bench. "You already acted out 5 Leprechaun cases, 6

Puppet Masters's and for some reason, 9 Annie: Girl of the Stars movies."

"Yeah, I know there were 10 Annie movies, but real A:GoS Fans don't count number 8!" She emphasized by slamming her fist upon the judge's bench. "Which totally violated the integrity of the A:GoS cinematic Universe!"

Once again, the judge interrupted Peacock, but this time he used his hammer to swat away the defendant's hand away from his desk. "What does that have to do with the Land Fraud charges against you?"

"Bottom line? In a world of psycho zombies, Leprechauns, Skullgirls and killer puppets who drill your eyeballs with their little screw hats, am I really such a bad person?" Peacock raised a question which she didn't give anyone enough time to even respond before she continued. "Just 'cause a few of my customers got buyers' remorse over the houses I sold them? I still believe in a place where overcrowding is never a problem. I still believe in a town called Chernobyl and in a planned community called Chernobyl Vista Heights."

"I find you guilt-" the judge was about to pass judgment but Peacock raised an objection.

"Hold your Hammer, M.C.! Cause I got proof of my innocence!" With a whistle several mail delivery men came to the courtroom carrying bags upon bags of letters which they proceeded to flood the judge's bench with. "Letters! Thousands of them-all addressed to a guy who'd never commit fraud: Santa. Delivered by the Canopy Kingdom Postal Service to me, proving that I am Santa."

This caused the gallery to explode in murmurs, but it wouldn't last long before the judge called for order in the court.

"Order, order!" He silenced the Gallery, before picking up one of the letters. "Even if these were relevant, which it isn't, these aren't

addressed to Santa, you idiot! They're addressed to Satan."

"What? Give me that!" Peacock snatched one of the letters and read the name of the addressed. "Stupid Postal Service!" she cursed before collecting herself. "Your Eminence, please instruct the jury to disregard the…"

"For the 19th time! There is no jury!" the judge said exasperated while pointing at the empty seats where the Jury would usually sit.

"Wow, I knew I was drunk, but I must be **drunk** ." Peacock chuckled a bit before continuing, "Regrettably, my liege, a jury of decent, hardworking, system-hating Dago-Canopians, was essential to my defense strategy." Because nowadays you couldn't say fish people because it was somehow considered racist. "So, I must take a mulligan and officially change my story. I now claim I was rendered incompetent by a known medical condition: Saturday Night Fever."

The judge finally had it with Peacock's antics and silenced her by throwing his hammer towards the girl's face. "If this state's three strikes law and three-day court limit hadn't crammed our prisons full of people, I'd still be able to send murderers and felons and **you** to jail, but I can't," he announced regrettably.

"Yes, I'm going to AnnieCon this year!" Peacock pumped her fist in a celebratory manner before she jumped into the Defense's bench and started dancing, causing the entire gallery to start talking.

"Freeze, you degenerate lout!" The judge commanded for order again. "You've shown galling contempt for this court, for me, but worst of all, for the law in front of the royal Princess, no less! What must they think of the law now? What lesson did they…?"

"Judge, F.Y.I, Annie: GoS starts in 2 hours, and I'm **way** across town."

"That's it! I'm making an example of you." The judge stood up in anger. "I hereby sentence you to community service!"

"Community service?! I prefer the Electric Chair!" But Peacock's objection fell into deaf ears.

"Community service it is!"

"Nooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!"

"I'm afraid to ask but… does court usually goes like this in this Loop?" a man dressed with a blue suit and red tie with a spiky hairdo asked the girl standing next to him outside of the courthouse.

"When it involves Peacock, it does," Marie explained with a monotone voice, not really all perturbed by the proceedings. "Just be glad that this happened here and not in your Loop, Mr. Wright."

"I guess…" Despite how strange his court battles were in his Loop, with the perspective of other Judicial Systems, he really wasn't looking forward to the day Peacock went to court in his Loop, as a defendant, a Lawyer, or even a witness.

"Finally! I'm free!" Peacock declared as she exited the courthouse with a grin plastered on her face. "And I got off with just 5000 hours of community service, that's like 45 minutes!"

"Actually that's around 7 months or so." Phoenix pointed out.

"What?! Stupid Metric System!"

The defense attorney assumed that the drunkenness hadn't dissipated yet.

"So? What do you have to do to give back to the community?" Marie asked, slightly curious.

"I have to go to a place call Malthus high or somethin'."

"You mean that school located in a ghetto cesspool full of crime and poverty and despair?" Marie asked for clarification on the matter, it

wouldn't be good if Peacock accidentally violated the stipulations of her sentence by going to the wrong address.

"Oh! That Malthus!" Peacock said with sudden remembrance. "That's like a block away from my house."

"Yeah, the commute is going to be a breeze," Marie said with a smile. "But let's worry about that later, let's go celebrate," she proposed. "And you can come as well, Mr. Wright."

"I… don't…" Phoenix tried to turn the offer down but he was grabbed from behind by Peacock in a faux chokehold.

"Come on Feenie! Let's go for some noodles! I know a place in Little Innsmouth!" And they were going to eat like there was no tomorrow.

"Little Innsmouth?!" Phoenix repeated slightly worried by the name.

"Yeah, and it's full of fish people."

"Patricia!" Marie reprimanded.

"Fine, Dago-Canopians!" Geez, some people were too PC.

"That's better," Marie said approvingly, before turning to the defense lawyer. "Don't you worry Mr. Wright. Little Innsmouth is very nice this time of the year, and their noodles are quite exquisite."

"I guess…" It seemed that he wouldn't be able to bail out of going out for lunch with these two. *'At least they are inviting me, for a change.'*

"Yes, let's go! My treat!" Peacock said as she pulled out a wallet which looked very familiar to Phoenix.

"Wait! Is that my wallet?" he asked as he desperately tried to look for his wallet on his own pockets.

"Last one to get there is a Porcupine Head!" the girl laughed before speeding away with Phoenix's wallet in hand, and not a second later

with Marie in tow.

"Hey wait!" Phoenix shouted as gave chase to the two girls. *'Why does this stuff always happen to me?'*

7.8 DrTempo, XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Disney][FFAF]

Mike Schimdt, the poor man who was the Anchor of the now infamous Loop involving a certain haunted pizzeria, walked into a bar where many a Looper was talking about the recent incident where Loopers from all over had gotten possessed.

Grabbing a big glass, he started drinking. Mickey Mouse looked at him, and asked, "What happened, Mike?"

Mike slammed an ad with the words *Freddy Fazbear's Pizzeria Grand Reopening* on the table. "I got the day shift... now some other poor fool's in for the horror I experience. And no doors to save him! All he has is a mask to fool the old animatronics..."

Mickey frowned. "Well, to cheer you up, how about we talk of ways we've handled your night shift? After this latest crisis..."

Mike nodded. "Sure. So, who's first to tell how they handled five nights at Freddy's?"

"Five Night's at Freddy's, huh?" The massive Big Band wondered as he took a sip of his glass of water. "It was damn creepy the first night, but then it was smooth sailing from there on…"

"How come…?" Schimdt asked.

"Well, since I more machine than man," from his 5000 lbs (2267.96 kg) only 95 lbs (43 kg) were organic. "They kind of… accepted me

as one of their own." Then Big Band gulped down the rest of his water. "After that… I really don't want to talk about it."

"Wow! Wow! Hold on! Are you saying those things at the restaurant can move on their own?" Peacock, the supposed Anchor for the Skullgirls Loop, intervened, looking completely confused.

"Yes…" Now it was Shimdt's turned to look confused. "Why? You didn't see them move?"

"Of course I did! But I thought it was I who gave them life to become my imaginary friends to stave off the boredom!" Peacock exclaimed as she light up a big cigar. "I fact I even opened the doors and invited them into my station for some beers and smokes with the rest of my gang, isn't that right guys?" She turned to look at her merry gang of not so imaginary friends.

"Yeah, you said it boss!" Andy and Tommy said as they lifting their Jager Bombs while Lenny and George just 'nodded'.

"And since they move when nobody was looking at them, we thought that maybe they were shy or something," Avery, the parasite bird that lived in Peacock's hat, added.

"Darn, now I feel like a fool," Peacock said as she put off her cigar on the astray. "What about you Marie? Have you been employed at Freddy's?" the human weapon asked to her bestest friend in the whole world, a possessed maid with a skull motif.

"Indeed I was," the Skullgirl answered. "After I deduced that the animatronics were possessed by some sort of evil force, I decided to appease them."

"How?" Schimdt asked curiously.

"With a sacrifice of blood of course," she said undisturbed by her words. "To do so, I pretended to be a 13 year old girl who wanted to meet and have fun with mature men and asked them to meet me at

Freddy's," the 13-year-old looking maid said. "After they came, I just instructed them to wait by the kitchen where there are no cameras and well…you can guess the rest."

"And you did this the five nights?" Peacock asked to her friend, receiving a nod in response. "Cool! I didn't know you had it in you, Marie."

"Been a Skullgirl created by the desire of revenge kind of desensitize you of the idea of killing people in horrifying ways." Just ask all those goons working for the Mafia she killed every Loop she was, awake or not.

"Okay… moving on. Who's next?" Mickey asked for another volunteer. Hopefully someone less creepy than these three.

"I didn't last the five days," Beowulf, ex-ex-retired wrestling champ from the Canopy Kingdom confessed as he gulped down a shot of tequila.

"Did the animatronics get to you?" Mike asked, feeling sympathy for the wrestler.

"Oh? No, no, nothing like that!" Beowulf shook his head. "I was fired."

"Fired?"

"Yes," the wrestler reiterated. "Since the Loops started I been getting the need for fighting strong opponents on the ring, and well… a job as a security guard isn't exactly my style…" He trailed off as he rubbed the back of his head. "So when I saw those things standing there I was like: *'Hey! Why don't I use them as training dummies for some of my new moves? They are robots after all.'* But let me tell you, those guys aren't as sturdy as one might think. So when the morning came, the manager found me trying to repair the broken down animatronics, so he fired me on the spot." Beowulf finished by

gulping down another shot and adding, "Didn't even get paid one cent."

"That's… unfortunate…" Mike said, not really knowing how to feel about this guy's tale.

"Um… I ended up working there too…" A soft voice spoke next to the massive frame of Big Band. "I didn't like it…" she said looking down and gripping her glass of grape juice ever so tightly.

"It must have been horrifying for you, miss…" Mike offered his sympathies to the petite girl who for some reason had scars of stitches adorning her face.

"Carol… but most people know me as the Painwheel," the little girl introduced herself.

Mike just remained silent, not wanting to intrude or even know why people called her that.

"You know, you don't have to tell the story if you don't want to kid," Big Band reassured Carol by putting one of his tiny pair of cushioned tipped claws that served as his hands for grabbing anything that was small.

"I know… but I got to get it out of my system, Ben!" Carol said to her father figure, before turning to look back at Mike. "I'm ashamed to say it, but in my panic I went full on 'CRAWLER' on them."

"Cr…Crawler?" Mike repeated back.

"It was something like this…"

Carol then stood up from her seat and lowered herself into the floor in a 'crab-walk' position. Then form her hands and feet, four long metallic black needles blades shot out from beneath her skin and elevated her body giving her a spider-like appearance. But she wasn't done yet, in that position she started to 'crawl' from the floor

up to the wall and into the ceiling. Once she was on top of their heads, her head did an entire 180° so she could look down to the ground. Then from her lower back, a segmented spine-like cord appeared which then sprung for metallic blades that started spinning creating a sound not unlike a rusty turbine or a very big chainsaw.

After she was done, Carol let herself go from the ceiling and fell perfectly into her seat, then her spine with blades disappeared from thin air, and into her 'pocket' and her head did another 180° returning back to its proper place.

"After that, the animatronics never moved again…" Carol confessed. "They were terrified of me, because to them I was the biggest and meanest monster there."

"You don't say?!" Peacock exclaimed. "That was some Silent Hill shit right there," she pointed out.

"I know…" Carol said sadden. "But I couldn't control myself and I ended up being feared by the monsters themselves." That was a severe blow to her self-esteem.

"The good thing is that you turn out ok!" Mike said as he slightly edged away from this group. *'Are all the people from their Loop such weirdos?'*

7.2 (con't) XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Blazblue]

Inside the Grand Cathedral of the Trinity, a battle was raging on between the Lycanthrope Buttler Valkenhayn and the Trinity's Avatar Double. As Double has assumed the form of Valkenhayn, she was privy of all of his attacks, techniques, and powers and used them far more effortlessly than the butler ever could. For example the use of his Drive, Wehrwolf.

Valkenhayn had the ability to effortlessly transform into his wolf form in different degrees. But to fully transform and battle in his complete wolf form required great effort and concentration on his part, especially at his age. But for the Doppelganger, the use of his signature Drive was easy. It reminded Valkenhayn of himself in his prime. It made him quite jealous. Because of the huge advantage his copy had over him, Valkenhayn was having trouble even keeping up with her/him/it. Every punch and kick he launched, she dodged or counter perfectly. She read him like an open book and probably knew him better than he knew himself. It was a irritating to say the least.

Even so, Valkenhayn had gave his word to his Master and he was going to fulfill his duty as the ever reliable butler of the Alucard family. Once more, Valkenhayn tried to outmaneuver Double by trying to go beyond the limits of his own body and tried to move faster than he had ever move before, but like always Double managed to duplicate and even surpass him in speed and sent him to the ground with another well placed strike.

"Why, where did that initial energy go?" DoubleValkenhayn taunted as s/he looked down at the downed form of the original butler. "Is this the limit of your devotion to your master?" It mocked him using his voice, his tone, his body language, his own face... that angered the Lycanthrope Butler.

"Shut your insolent mouth, monster!" Valkenhayn growled in anger as he struggled to stand up. "I'm not finished yet. As long as I draw breath I shall continue to fight for Milady."

"Hm. Humans are the real monsters," DV said without remorse or hesitation. "That is why-"

But then s/he turned silent, reassumed the form of the nun, and put her hands in the form of a prayer.

Valkenhayn had no idea what was going on, but he didn't complain. He needed time to catch his breath. After a few seconds of silence,

Double turned her attention back to him. "It's seems my masters grow tire of this match."

"What?"

"They said that a 'mirror match' is interesting at first, but loses its appeal very quickly." Or at very least at these current power levels. "That is why they ask of me to turn into a different form, to kill you."

"Then come! Whatever the form you take doesn't matter to me." Valkenhayn said. Deep down he was slightly relieved he didn't have to fight himself, but on the other hand the next form she'd assume could be far stronger.

"I am an instrument of my masters' will, their words are my law," Double said as she began to transform into another individual.

She now was a thin man of relatively advanced age, probably around 50 to 60 years old with a long black hair styled in a ponytail. The man was dressed in butler attire alongside a monocle on the left eye which was grey.

"Hello there," Double greeted with a British accent. "My name is Walter C. Dornez, butler and ex-vampire hunter for the Hellsing Organization." 'Walter' introduced himself. "I answer the door, I clean up the estate, and I take out the trash. And I also kill individuals of… mythical persuasion."

Deep in the catacombs another battle was taking place.

Rachel Alucard moving gracefully as if it was an elaborate dance, dodged and destroyed all the skeleton minions Marie was sending her way.

"Is this all you are capable of? Just standing there waiting while your skeletons do all the work for you?" Rachel taunted as she destroyed the last standing skeleton. "Disappointing."

"I'll say! I was expecting you to defeat them, but to take so long… I'm the one who's disappointed, Rachel Alucard."

"Well, now that they are all gone, it is just you and I," the vampire said, confident that the odds were on her favor.

"Oh! But those were just the first wave!" Marie said. "Now is time for the second!" She lifted her arms causing more undead to rise from the ground. "Go!" she commanded and her squadron of new undead warriors obeyed without question.

"More of the same?" Rachel said, bored. "I don't have time to waste with these annoyances…" Then a magic circle appeared around her signifying the charging of her attack. "Begone!" she shouted, and a powerful blast of energy was released and directed at the new wave of undead warriors. Seeing the incoming projectile, one of the undead stepped forward and put his arms in front of him, creating a light barrier that absorbed Rachel's magic blast. "How?"

"The power of the Skullgirl is to recruit the dead into her own arsenal and use them as she see fit. That includes the dead's own powers and techniques," Marie explained in a cold monotone voice. "In this case, this magic-user from the Chess Kingdom I found dead in No Man's Land is still as powerful as he was when alive. And he is not the only one," she said referring to the others on the squadron.

"So? They aren't as useless as I thought…" Now Rachel could see why the Skullgirl was so terrifying; being able to make dead warriors fight for her with all of their strength intact. "Even so, they are just mere annoyances, and nothing else."

"You'll see they are more than capable of keeping up with you."

7.9 Masterweaver

"The reports you asked for, your highness." Adam handed a file to the princess. "I took the liberty of looking over them-"

Parasoul looked up. "Anything?"

"I've already got men investigating the leads. But..." He shook his head. "It's just a collection of possibilities, nothing certain."

"Damn." Parasoul slammed the file down. "I should have... I should have put more guards on her, or been there myself-"

"You can't focus on what you could have done," Adam said firmly.

"It's been five hours since Umbrella vanished!"

"Yes, *only* five hours. And you have the resources of the kingdom to search for her." Adam sighed. "I understand you're upset, and this *is* a serious situation, but if you run yourself ragged looking for your sister you'll be no good when we do find her."

Parasoul rubbed her forehead. "I... damn, Adam, I know that, it's just... I keep imagining what might have happened. Political opposition, kidnapping her for ransom? Some cultists trying to sacrifice her to a Parasite posing as a god? A rogue ASG lab picking her up for experimentation? Maybe she didn't look both ways before crossing a street... maybe whoever's got her doesn't know who she is and is already packing her into a human trafficking ring... maybe she took some candy from a friend, or maybe she's just run away because she feels unloved, and I've got to get something, anything to get her back on my radar or I'm going to go crazy!"

Adam opened his mouth, but before he could say anything a phone rang. Parasoul's hand snapped out and latched onto it, bringing the handset to her ear. "You've reached the office of Princess Parasoul," she said, her voice professional even through an expression of worry. "What is it you need?"

A soft voice came from the speaker.

"...Yes, Marie, I'm Awake. Look, I'm busy at the moment, so-"

The voice asked a question.

Parasoul tensed up, her hand clutching the handset tightly. "Yes. What do you know?"

Adam couldn't quite hear the voice on the other end of the phone, but he could read Parasoul's expression. Wary fear, then cold anger, then a touch of sorrow...

The princess pinched her brow in exasperation. "And you didn't think to tell me this earlier because...?"

The voice replied with a touch of embarrassment.

"...Right. I'm going to be picking her up in..." Parasoul ran over her schedule. "Two hours. And I expect her to be ready to go, understand?"

The voice agreed-

"Good." Parasoul slammed the phone back on its hook and dropped her head to the desk with a groan.

"...Your highness?"

"Umbrella's been located. Call off the search."

"Yes, your highness." Adam paused. "If... I may ask, where is she?"

Parasoul looked up, running her fingers through her hair. "She's either in incredible danger or safer than I could ever make her, and I don't know which possibility is worse."

7.10 Masterweaver

Ben Birdland sat down on a bar stool heavily. Not that he could sit any other way, but this time his exasperation seemed amplified. "Gin," he grumbled, putting a few bones on the counter.

Beowulf glanced up from his own drink. "Bad day?"

"Not any more than usual."

"Bad day, then. Or a bad loop...?"

Ben rolled his eyes. "You know Peacock and Marie are together, right?"

"What, like... like a couple?"

"Yeah."

"...aren't they a little young for that?"

Ben gave him a flat look.

"...Ah, yeah. After what they've gone through, I guess they don't count as young." Beowulf considered him. "You don't approve?"

"Oh, they're good for each other," Ben assured him. "Usually. It's just that usually Marie is able to rein in Peacock's crazier ideas, but sometimes she encourages them."

"Aaaaah." Beowulf sipped his drink. "I don't know them that well, but I'm pretty sure that could be a problem."

"You have no idea." Ben took the drink the bartender gave him. "I don't like being on damage control. I'm just glad she didn't break out the stuff she learned from Toon university."

7.2 (con't) XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Blazblue]

Back on the Cathedral, Valkenhayn was having problems trying to evade Double's new form Walter, let alone attack. *'Those damned wires!'* From his gloves, DoubleWalter used micro-filament wires that he could use with extreme precision to slice anything he caught with them. Like his arm.

"This reminds me of the time Alucard and I stormed an enemy base in Poland back in World War 2," Walter said reminiscently. "That time I also encountered a werewolf who also had regenerative abilities," he said while looking at Valkenhayn's arm already growing back. "But unlike the Captain, you I can cut easily."

Double used his wires to try and slice Valkenhayn into several small pieces, but the werewolf butler managed to move out on the way just in the nick of time.

' *He almost got me with that one,'* Valkenhayn thought alarmed. *'At this rate, I don't think I'll be able to last much longer.'* Not to mention, the constant use of his regenerative abilities was taking its toll on him. *'Madame Rachel… I'm afraid I won't be there on time with your celebratory tea.'*

Down on the Catacombs, Rachel was faring better than Valkenhayn, but that didn't mean she had the advantage in the battle. The vampire had to deal with fighting against several undead warriors, all of which fought in different ways. But the most difficult of them all were a group of nurses that attacked in perfect tandem with each other.

There were four of them. The black haired dreary-looking one that attacked with pointy syringes filth with god-knows-what; the blond haired with the horns who attacked with an extending IV polearm; the red-headed big chested-one that attacked by launching an infinite supply of scalpels as if they were kunai; and the brunet gigantic one that used bodybags of all things in very strange and

creative ways. Not only were they armed, these nurses moved at incredible speed and with great agility to match too. They reminded Rachel of Bang Shishigami and his ninja from Ikaruga.

"Enough!" Rachel proclaimed as she unleashed the power of her Drive Silpheed, granted her the complete control over the element of wind, thus summoning a power blast of wind that sent all of her opponents flying off. "Skullgirl, I grow tired of this, it is time I finish this!" Rachel summoned several rods that soon filled the catacombs. "Sword of Iris!" she called out and conjured up several bolts of lightning in a thunderous display, destroying everything. Including the floor they were standing on which caved in.

After the electricity dissipated, Rachel, using her Drive to keep herself afloat over the lack of floor, looked around for the Skullgirl. "Where is she?" she wondered out-loud. When she found no trace of her, she looked down into the dark abyss that had formed beneath her. "She must have fallen." And the Heart alongside her. "I guess this means I am going down the rabbit hole." Who knew what could be down there? But if she wanted the heart and her wish, she would have to descend.

With the help of Silpheed Rachel made her descent slowly and gracefully as possible. As she went farther and farther into the depths of the dark abyss, the vampire started feeling this strange sensation of been observed. But not by an enemy, but by this sort of otherworldly 'presence' that made her skin stand to end. *'Why am I feeling like this?'* It had been so long since she felt this kind of cold sensation. *'It's almost as if I'm getting scared…'* Which sounded quite ridiculous on her head, but the further she descended into the darkness the stronger the feeling got. *'W-what is going on?'*

Soon she got her answer. The darkness that permeated the place soon gave up to light as she finally reached the bottom. As the vampire finally took her surroundings, the feeling of coldness instantly turned into sickness.

"Where am I?" she asked with repulsion and fear creeping in her voice.

The underground area below the catacombs of the Grand Cathedral of the Trinity was a barren underground wasteland that extended far beyond Rachel eyes could see, but the sheer size of the place wasn't what upset her. It was what this place was made of.

Flesh. The entirety of the place, including the floor she was standing on, was covered and red bloody flesh; red bloody BREATHING flesh.

Unable to stop looking, Rachel also noticed the place was filled with teeth and eyes scattered all around without any rhyme or reason, and with all sorts of inconsistent sizes. And the eyes… the eyes blinked and followed her movement. They… they were staring right at her.

Then, then Rachel started hearing something. It started slow and quiet, but soon it became more prominent and resounding. The sound of a beating Heart. That's when she noticed the large pulsating veins that went all around the place, and the sound of something pulsing through them.

A heart pumping blood. Blood that was stagnated and formed an entire lake on the horizon. Then there were the murmurs. Although she couldn't understand one bit, she knew that those voices were human and they were talking about her.

' *Th-this place is alive…!'* Rachel thought trembling, more terrified than she had ever felt in her long life. Had she not been so scared of the floor, she would've collapsed on it by now.

"You came all the way here," Marie said as she looked at the trembling blond vampire. "Do you like it?"

"W-w-what…?" Rachel barely stammered out, her voice trembling so much and her stomach so sick for her to be able to for complete sentences.

"I do not know what exactly this place is," Marie said as she looked at the horrifying surroundings. "But judging by the columns, statues, and other broken debris in this place, it seems to imply that an old civilization used to live in here."

' *Live here?!'* Rachel thought disgusted. *'What could possibly thrive in such place?'*

"Although I do know what this place is called: Gehenna," Marie said nonchalantly before giving a small chuckle. "Although someone I know calls it this world's Fetus of God."

"F-Fetus…?" Rachel repeated feeling even sicker.

"But I highly doubt this is the womb of the Holy Mother." Marie shrugged away such notions. "I like to think of this place as a little piece of Hell on the Earth. A fitting place for your demise."

"You… just what is wrong with this world? Answer me!" Rachel demanded, losing her refined persona.

Marie just stared at her ignoring her question. "Rachel Alucard, here in this cursed land you'll find damnation, by my hand or your very own." Then the maid summoned her trademark weapon, a demonic vacuum cleaner. "Come, and let us end this fight once and for all."

7.11 XeroM52

Parasoul sighed as she kept on doing some paperwork. Usually she would hate doing this, and relegate this task to one of her most trusty advisors, but after so many crazy fused Loops, the monotony of reading and approving or disapproving all sort of legal and bureaucratic manners was welcoming at the moment.

Despite her newfound appreciation for doing paperwork once in a while, she couldn't spend the entire day trapped in her office; she

had promised Umbrella that they were going to have a movie night together and watch all the favorite movies they managed to rent from the video store. One movie in particular she wanted to watch was in fact a rare copy indeed, at least for her. It seemed that this world had a slight variation in which the movies of Annie: Girl of the Stars, had different cast choices and new art direction. As one of the biggest fans of the show (although she would never admit it out-loud to ANYONE ever) it made her immensely happy since it meant that she had new collectibles and the show would never get stale or boring, gods forbid that.

Yes. Tonight was going to be a good night indeed. She couldn't wait to finish this paperwork and get back home. *'I only hope Umbrella doesn't start movie night without me.'* Gods know how impatient that girl could be. Still, she loved her little sister to death and knew that tonight they would have a well-deserved good time together.

Parasoul was about to return back to her work when the door to her office was knocked three times. "Come in…" Weird, she wasn't expecting anyone. And if this was an emergency, they would've called her by phone. Then the door of her office opened and let an unexpected visitor in.

"Sorry for the intrusion, your highness." Marie, the maid Skullgirl, entered the office. "I know is somewhat late but I had to speak with you."

"Is something wrong?" Parasoul asked with her mind going over hundreds of possible scenarios since Marie never visited without a good reason, which spelled trouble most of the time.

"Yes and no," Marie answered vaguely. "For me and Patricia it is a problem and it could be a problem for you too. Probably." The last word being the key word here.

"What is it?" the princess asked worriedly but at the same time with slight curiosity, since Peacock and Marie usually dealt with their problems in their own unique ways; and often involved the

destruction of one or several buildings or blocks of her precious kingdom.

Marie closed her eyes and took a deep breath before answering. "Patricia and I have misplaced a very… private and personal thing of ours," she admitted with a sigh. "A video."

"A video…?" Parasoul repeated already imagining a lot of things, but she didn't want to jump at any conclusions. "What sort of video…?"

Marie remained completely silent for a few seconds as if debating if she should really say it or not. "It's a video of us… doing something that isn't meant for the eyes of certain people…"

"That doesn't tell me much." Not really, it said much but the redhead didn't know exactly what the maid was implying. "Is this some sort of video of you two during one of your killing sprees, or what?" she asked, knowing that couldn't be the answer but she had to make sure, besides she was slightly invaded by morbid curiosity.

Again Marie remained silent for a few seconds before answering. "As you know Patricia and I are very close…" She stopped for another second before continuing. "We do anything together and… we wanted to reinforce the bonds we share while doing… something very adult."

This piqued the Princess's curiosity even more. "You mean… you two…" she trailed off almost embarrassed to say it out-loud herself. *'I can believe this, and they recorded it too!'*

"Yes, the two of us… with several other couples too."

Now this reveal almost had the crowned princess experiment a major meltdown. "What?!" She managed to exclaim after the shock of hearing those words came down. "You mean you and Peacock… with other people at the same time…?" she asked hesitantly to which Marie just nodded. "And you recorded that?" This was truly something she never expected to hear from the two of them. She

knew the two girls were close, but to do something like this was inconceivable.

"As you can imagine, this video is very important to us." Marie said snapping Parasoul from her distressed thoughts.

"I can see why this is a problem and why you want this 'thing' back." Honestly, she still was processing that the two girls had done and recorded something like 'that'. "What I don't know is why this could be a problem for me too." And by Gods, please don't tell her that her unawake self had participated in it; because if that was the case, she would have to kill someone.

"You see… we wouldn't have lost a video if there hadn't been a mix-up?" Marie explained once again too vaguely.

"Mix-up?"

"We accidentally put our video in one of the cases of a movie we rented." Marie further explained. "When we realized there had been a mix-up, we went back to the video store to retrieve it, we were informed that the video had been already rented; after some… 'talking', we managed to convince the manager to give us the list of people who might have rented the case with our movie in it."

"Wait! You couldn't possibly mean I…" Parasoul voice was filling with dread.

"Yes, you were one of the people on the list." Marie cut in. "So if you could give us back our video. It is inside the Annie: Girl of the Stars movie case."

"Oh my Gods!" Parasoul stood up from her seat and shouted completely horrified. "I left Umbrella with the movies back home!" And knowing her, Annie: Girl of the Stars movie was going to be the first she would pop in. "We have to get back home and get that movie before she sees it!"

Seeing the usually steely Princess flip out like this was a strange sight to behold, but Marie decided not to comment on that. "Here, I'll teleport us both with him." She said as she waved her arm and summoned one of her many undead minions she had collected throughout the multiverse. The minion was a blue skinned young man with pointy ears and tail. "Kurt if you could please help us get to the Renoir Castle." Despite being an emotionless husk of his former self, it didn't mean Marie couldn't treat him with proper etiquette and respect. "Princess please place your hand on him." She said as she placed her hand on Kurt.

Any other time Parasoul would have questioned Marie about this 'minion' of hers, but there was no time for that, she had to save the innocence of her younger sister. "Right!" and as soon as the two of them were touching him, the three of them teleported with a BAMF.

[BAMF]

In less than a second, the three of them appeared inside the castle.

Not wasting any time, Parasoul was the first to run towards her room where her sister probably was. "UMBRELLA!"

Marie just watched her go before she turned to Kurt. "Thank you very much, Kurt." She bowed to express her gratitude. "Now you can go back to rest." She relieved him by sending him back inside her subspace pocket before she gave chase after the Princess.

"UMBRELLA!" Parasoul kept on shouting as she arrived at her room's door and kicked it open. "UMBRELLA!" she exclaimed as she saw her poor little sister on the floor and quickly kneeled besides her. "Umbrella! Are you okay?" She asked as she examined her sister. She panting exhaustedly and was completely red-faced.

"Sis…I feel…hot all over…" The pink haired princess managed to say between pants, "And my legs they feel funny…"

As a big sister, she was horrified hearing these words from her little sister, but right now wasn't the time for that, she had to comfort the poor little girl. "It's alright, I am here now!" she gave poor Umbrella a big hug. "Big sister is here for you." She embraced her as her sister soon pass out from exhaustion.

"It looks like we arrived too late." Marie commented as she stepped into the room and watched the two sisters on the floor. "I didn't think she would react like this though." She said not once drawing away from her monotone voice. "I'll just take the video and leave you two alone." But as soon as she was about to retrieve the video, Parasoul stopped her.

"No!" The Crowned ruler said angry. "In order to explain Umbrella what she saw correctly, I need to see this 'thing' first." If not who knows what sort of twisted mentality she could develop. It was her duty as a big sister to set things right.

"Are you sure about that?" Marie questioned as she looked deep into Parasoul's eyes. "Once you see it, you cannot unsee it." She warned sternly. "Not to mention, you'll have to promise to never reveal what you'll see or else."

"I don't care!" Parasoul retorted unafraid. "I'll do anything to protect my little sister. Even if I have to give up my life to do so." In fact she already did once, when she wished upon the Skullheart to have Umbrella to never become the Skullgirl.

"Very well…" Marie conceded and turned to the TV and rewound the video. "You asked for this," Marie said and finally pressed play.

The video started completely dark with several shadows moving around as ominous music started to play and a narrator with heavy Japanese accent kicked in. "Sent the Kiddiesu away. This is sutoricly for adults." Then it showed a warning on the screen that said: only for 18 up.

Then the lights were turned on and show a man with an onion for a head wearing sweat clothes several people behind him.

"Oh yesssu. It is time to get romantic-u." the onion head announced as the music changed beats into a more pumping one and everyone began dancing.

Time to get romantic, yes indeed that's for sure

Da kick punch style remains very secure

Never pending, always the first, to make a move.

This, time, we get, down nice and smooth.

Then the camera changed focus as it showed the people behind the Onion Head grouped by couples dancing and following his very moves exactly as he did. Between these people, Marie and Peacock were dancing along as a couple themselves.

" ***Love Kick*** *,"* the Onion Head sang as he kick said kick, with everyone else behind him following him while singing along *"Love Kick!"*

Love punch. */ Love punch.* ***Love duck.*** */ Love duck.* ***Love turn.*** */ Love turn.* ***Love chop.*** */ Love chop.* ***Love twist.*** */ Love twist.* ***Love pose.*** */ Love pose.* ***Love hug.*** */ Love hug.* ***Smooth kick.*** */ Smooth kick.* ***Nice punch.*** */ Nice Punch.* ***Sweet chop.*** */ Sweet chop.* ***Love fight.*** */ Love fight.*

Because I'm smooth, with a groove so new,

I wish everybody had the-

Then the rest of the song was interrupted when Parasoul pressed the pause button. "What the heck is this…?" she asked, completely perplexed.

"It's a video of Romantic Karate," Marie pointed out. "Patricia managed to get us spots for a special class with Tamanegi-Sensei."

"But… I... you…" Parasoul mumbled, confused. She tried to organize her thoughts and form coherent sentences. "You said this was a video of you two doing something very adult!"

"Yes. Didn't you see the warning at the beginning?" Marie said referring to the 18 and up thing. "Romantic Karate is a very physically demanding exercise, and it is not recommended for younglings. Or they could pass out." Just like Umbrella did just now. "We managed to get in, by claiming to be very short." That and with very authentic fake IDs.

"So you're saying that this scare was just for a tape of you two doing Karate?" Parasoul resumed the previous events in a nutshell. "Is that it?"

"Yes." Marie nodded. "What did you though the video was about, Your Highness?" she asked, putting Parasoul on the spot.

"No, nothing. Just forget I said anything." There was no way in hell she would ever admit what she imagined the video was about. "Just take your video and leave. I'll put Umbrella to bed." The poor thing was exhausted.

"Thank you for understanding." Marie bowed as she retrieved her video. "And please remember not to tell anyone about this. It is kind of embarrassing…"

"Believe me, I will not tell anyone about this EVER."

"I shall take my leave then." Marie summoned Kurt back out and was about to leave but then she remembered something. "Oh, I almost forgot." Marie then took out the Annie: Girl of the Stars movie and gave it Parasoul who gladly accepted it. "Here, enjoy your movie, your highness." And with that Marie and Kurt were gone in a BAMF!

Parasoul just stood there in silence as she looked down at the movie on her hand. "So much for movie night…" she sighed tiredly. This was the last time she let Marie's vague explanations put her mind in the gutter.

Then Umbrella started to mumble in her sleep. "Smooth...like… butter….caress…your lover…" she sang, much to Parasoul's horror.

"Marieeeeeeeee!" She really should've watched the whole tape.

7.12 Masterweaver

[Punch Out][Skullgirls][Revamp]

Beowulf frowned down at his opponent. "You're a famous wrestler?"

"Boxer, technically. But I can fight a wrestler."

The muscular man shrugged, getting into a fighting stance. "Well, let's see what you got!"

Little Mac smirked, raising his gloves. "You're new to looping, aren't you?"

7.2 (con't) XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Blazblue]

Back on the surface, Valkenhayn was finally cornered by his opponent.

"It seems that this fight has come to an end," Walter said as he trapped the Werewolf butler into his web of strings. "I must say that you provided excellent entertainment for my Masters," he

commended with an ironic tone. "But now it is time for you to die. Any last words?"

"Milady… I failed…" Valkenhayn barely managed to say. "Please, get the Heart and save yourself…"

"Your faith and loyalty towards your Master is admirable… you really are the pinnacle of your profession," DoubleWalter commended again but this time without any sense of irony or insult. "Now I'll give you the highest honor! Dying serving your Master!"

As he was about to pull the strings and slice of Valkenhayn into several small pieces of bloody meat, a third voice cut in from above.

" **Make way for Peacock!"**

DoubleWalter looked up and saw a large Moai statue coming directly at him. Moving as fast as he could, he liberated Valkenhayn from his wires and used them to slice off the giant statue that was about to crush him. Unfortunately for Double, falling right behind the now destroyed pieces of the Moai was another big object.

"Rōdorōrāda!" Someone shouted as a steamroller crashed on top of Double. But that wasn't all, on top of the heavy machinery a small bluish-green bird wearing a dress and a hat screeched in a loud manner.
"WRYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY
YYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!"

Then the bird proceeded to peck the steamroller while shouting. "Muda! **Muda!** " And with a mighty final peck, the steamroller exploded in a fiery blaze.

"Now that's what I call steamrolling the competition!" Peacock laughed as she appeared right besides Valkenhayn while smoking a

cigar. "Hey, how you holding up, gramps?"

"Who…?" The butler asked as he struggled to get back on his feet.

"The name's Peacock, Jeeves!" Peacock introduced herself. "But you may call me Sir Peacock!"

Valkenhayn would've said something to refute this, but he was far too injured to protest. "Milady… I got to get to her… the skullgirl…"

"Woah! Woah! Hold on there, Jarvis." Peacock interrupted him. "Are you saying there's someone else in here? And that she's fighting the Skullgirl?"

"Exactly… I have to assist her," Valkenhayn said, regaining his breath and slowing letting his injuries sustained in battle slowly heal. "If the Skullgirl is as powerful as this creature was, then milady is probably in trouble."

"'Was' is kind of a strong word…" Peacock said looking at where the steamroller had exploded. "When the Trinity wants her to be, Double is frickin' vicious, and impossible to kill."

"So you are saying…"

"Double still lives," Peacock revealed dramatically. "And depending on what her mission is… we might have to keep on fighting her."

"You speak wise words, Project Peacock," Double said as she reformed into her grotesque form of disjointed body parts, guts, and faces of the damned. "As a tool for my Masters, I am as strong as I need to be. No more, no less."

"No shit, you are usually very inconsequential in the majority of the loops…" Peacock pointed out as she dropped her cigar into the carpet and squashed it with her sole. "So for you to be this powerful, means the hot incestuous bisexual god sisters Aeon and Venus are planning something."

"The Trinity works in mysterious ways, and you could never even begin to comprehend their plans for this world," Double said ignoring Peacocks insults to her beloved gods.

"I could care less what those two want to accomplish. I'm just glad I get to beat your sorry ass, if you even have one you freaking bubblegum glob," Peacock said confidently as she cracked her knuckles and her neck in preparation for a fight. "Come on, I'll beat you up so hard your religion is going to start making sense to you!"

"As amusing as it might be to kill you, today is not that day. My Masters are satisfied with my work, and there is no further need for me to do anything else," Double said this as she started to 'melt' into the floor and slowly dissolve. "We'll see each other another time, Peacock!" and soon she was gone leaving just Peacock and Valkenhayn alone.

"Looks like you miss out, Nigel," Peacock said turning to the butler. "This could've been one of the most badass battles your eyes would've ever seen."

"A true shame…" Valkenhayn said ironically as he stood up taller, now that he had more time to rest and recover. "I assume there is quite a large history behind all of this and I'll not intrude."

"No question asked? You are my kind of guy, Niles."

"Although there is ONE thing I hope you don't mind clarifying," He asked politely as the reliable butler he was. "You mentioned something about 'loops'…"

"Look Alfred that is a long-ass conversation that I don't like answering, and if you have a buddy with you here, that means I have to tell it twice if I say something now. So could you just wait until we get this toots of yours?" Really, Peacock wasn't looking forward for that conversation.

"True. Let's get to Madame Rachel as soon as possible. And help her with the Skullgirl!"

"Um... Geoffrey, about the Skullgirl…"

Down below in Gehenna, which was a synonym for Hell, two young-looking girls were locked in deep battle.

Rachel was fighting against Marie on a one-on-one battle. The skullgirl refused to summon more minions and instead opted for direct combat, using her demonic Vacuum Cleaner as a weapon. Rachel would've laughed at it if it weren't for Marie using it as a very effective and deadly weapon.

No matter what the vampire tried, the Skullgirl countered effectively. If Rachel tried to fight long range casting spells, Marie would use her vacuum to blow and shoot 'Dust Bunnies' at her interrupting her casts. Trying to place her lighting rods was also useless since Marie would turn on her vacuum and suck anything, no matter the size, into it. And fighting close range using her summoned swords was difficult because Marie would then turn the Vacuum's nozzle into a blade and use it as a scythe.

Marie was a versatile fighter now matter how Rachel tried to approach the situation.

"See how weak you are, Rachel Alucard!" Marie mocked as they cross blades. "Your efforts to wrestle the heart away from me are futile! The Skull Heart power is mine to wield and my burden to bear."

"Nonsense! I'll get that Heart and I'll get my wish!"

"So sure you can defeat me?" Marie taunted again as she swung her scythe and send Rachel flying backwards when she block the strike. "Know your place."

"I know my place!" Rachel shot back. "Know yours, you dusty maid." She activated her Drive Silpheed to summon a powerful wind blast towards Marie.

"Here's a surprise!" Marie said as she used her demonic vacuum to suck the entire blast into itself. "Time to dust up!" she quipped before she returned the blast back to the vampire.

"AH!" Rachel shouted in pain as her own attack blast her away and sent her into a fleshy ground. "Kuh!" the vampire grunted as she struggled to get up. "You…"

"Me? What?" Marie asked as she instantly appeared behind her and put the edge of the Scythe up to Rachel's neck. "Don't resist, Rachel Alucard."

"You… when did you…" Rachel tried to say but was quickly ignored and interrupted by Marie.

"You had your chance to escape, Rachel Alucard. But instead, you decided to chase after me and fell directly into the depths of hell itself, and for what? A wish? Your own selfish ambition brought you upon your own demise."

"You may call me selfish, but I'm not the one who transformed into the Skullgirl for not having a pure heart," Rachel countered.

"How presumptuous…" Marie pointed out, annoyed. "That arrogance and pride of yours would've easily transform you into a Skullgirl."

"My Heart is pure enough," Rachel defended. "And even if that weren't the case, and I ended up cursing myself, I would've never succumbed into a being of destruction and chaos like you did. I'm far above that." She had endured thousands upon thousands of years and never caved in upon her own vampiric desires. The power of the SkullHeart would be next to nothing compared to that.

"Silence!" Marie ordered as she brought the scythe closer to Rachel's neck, but said nothing to put down the vampire's argument. "I see that you are blind to the error of your ways, but I am not without mercy. Either you die or you serve me and my just cause."

"Hmp. Preposterous! I would never bow down to someone such as you," Rachel answered earning the edge of the scythe to press even further into her neck drawing blood.

"You will be a unique addition to my army. Be my general, or dirt to sweep up," Marie said once more.

"I prefer to die than lower myself to serve a dusty maid," Rachel answered without an ounce of fear.

"Very well, I shall put an end to your miserable life, vampire," Marie said coldly. "But before, I'll kill you I wish to know something, Rachel Alucard."

"What is it?" the vampire asked defiantly.

"By any chance are you related to the vampire known as the Crimson Fucker?"

"The what?!" Rachel asked, scandalized.

"No? Well, I'm sure with a name like yours you'll get to know him pretty soon. The universe has that twisted sort of humor," Marie said with a small smile as she retired the scythe from Rachel's neck. "Also, welcome to the Loops Rachel Alucard."

"Wait, what is going on?" the blond vampire asked completely confused by this completely 180° turn in attitude. "And did you just said Loops?"

"Sorry, for being a little rough Ms. Alucard. I was just playing a prank with you, since you are new to the Loops," Marie said apologetically.

"But don't worry, I'll explain everything as soon as Patricia comes here."

"Look down below!" a voice said as a TV came crashing to the ground. Then it suddenly turned on by itself despite not being plugged at all, and from inside the screen Peacock stepped out followed by Valkenhayn. "Marie! Guess what? I got myself a man-servant!" Peacock said enthusiastically as she pointed out to the butler behind her. "This is my man Godfrey."

"For the last time, Ms. Peacock, I am not your servant," Valkenhayn said clearly annoyed.

"Hey! I save your life Cadbury! In some cultures that means you got to serve him for the rest of your life or until you save my life," Peacock explained. "Now, bring me some Scotch on the rocks, Camo pajama pants, Predator 3D on Bluray and some Lube, cause I'm having a party tonight. Now hurry up Woodhouse, chop, chop!"

"Perfect timing! Rachel Alucard, I would like you to meet, Patricia Watson, the first known looper of this world," Marie introduced her friend.

"Yo! Name's Patricia but you shall call me Peacock. By the way, do you have any relation with the Crimson Fucker?"

"Sadly no," Marie answered for Rachel. "But I'm sure she'll meet him sooner rather than later. But now that we are all here, let us get away from this disgusting place and discuss the current state of the Multiverse over a cup of tea." Then she gave a sideways glance at Peacock. "Or some scotch."

"You tell 'em, Marie!" Peacock shouted in approval. "Come on we can travel through the TV."

"Valkenhayn…"

"Yes, Milady?"

"I think I lost track of what is going on."

"You are not the only one Madam Rachel."

7.13 XeroM52

"Are we really doing this?" Peacock asked with an already bored look on her face. "I mean, really?" The cyborg girl had forgone her usual dress and was forced into wearing overalls and wading boots.

"Yes, Peacock. We are going fishing," Parasoul answered for the nth time that day. "I would do you good to do some outdoors activities that don't involve killing and maiming members of the Mafia." The resulting paperwork of such excursions was really a pain in the ass. She too was dressed for the occasion, wearing a square-patterned shirt underneath a khaki vest.

"I have to agree with Peacock on this one, your highness…" Beowulf said as he rubbed his neck. "No, offense but fishing isn't exactly how I envisioned spending my day." That, and he wasn't comfortable with the fishing clothes either.

"Neither did I," Carol, the last member of their makeshift group, said shyly. "But I don't mind, I've never gone fishing before…" She, unlike everyone else, had gone for a yellow raincoat over some normal clothes.

"It will do us good to try and do new things," Parasoul declared, convinced. "This will be a great learning experience for all of us."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's all well and good but…" Peacock interrupted with her arms crossed still not on board with the whole fishing day thing. "Why did you rent this crappy boat?" she asked pointing at the small ship they were riding in. "Aren't you a princess? Couldn't we've used a royal yacht, one with satellite TV, perhaps?"

"The point of this is to do stuff besides being in-doors watching TV," the princess explained once again. "It may not look like it, but I'm sure we will all have fun today!"

[8 hours later…]

"Princess…? Can we go home now?" Carol asked sounding very tired. "We been here for hours and we haven't caught anything…"

"Not a single darn fish." Beowulf too looked like he was about to drop any second now. "Needless to say, this was a bust."

"No it wasn't!" Parasoul answered with a face that didn't inspire much confidence. "We are having fun here! And we aren't going anywhere until we catch some fish… without the use of Loop powers or any powers at all!" She then proceeded to cackle in a very unrefined and unnatural way.

"Mr. Wulf… I think she lost it," Carol whispered to the older man after they had slowly retreated away from the mad princess. "What are we going to do?"

"There are lots of things we can do… but not all of them are morally correct." For example, jumping overboard and swimming/gliding all the way back to shore either leaving the Princess behind, or probably just knocking out the Princess and taking control of the boat themselves. "For now, let's try and catch at least one fish…" he suggested. "If that fails then we'll have to go for plan B."

"What about Peacock?" Carol asked worriedly. "Shouldn't we try and wake her up?" Said girl had fallen asleep two hours into the excursion and hadn't woke up since then. "It's been six hours already…" A very long time for a nap while onboard a boat.

"I'm sure she's fine…" Beowulf said unworried. "She probably knocked herself out hoping that skip the whole trip by sleeping."

"Yes but… six hours seems like a lot. We need to wake her up," Carol said with pleading eyes that Beowulf had difficulty saying no to.

"Fine," he said, giving in. "But if she's cranky and starts chewing our ears off, you know who to blame for," he warned but Carol was not discouraged at all for said possibility.

Walking towards the sleeping girl, who hadn't moved at all for the last six hours, Beowulf finally put a hand on the girl's shoulder and tried to wake her up. "Hey, Peacock! Wake up!" But she didn't respond at all. "Hey! Hey! Not time for sleep!" He tried again, this time a little more forceful than before, but it yielded the same results. Peacock didn't wake up. "Come on, kid! No more fooling around."

Seeing that Beowulf's attempts were getting louder and louder, it finally caught the attention of the Princess. "What is going on here?" she asked looking angry. "Stop all this racket at once! You are scaring the fish away."

"Your Highness! Please help us!" Carol stepped in. "Something is very wrong. Peacock isn't waking up!"

"Huh? She's been just lazy!" The still unbalanced Princess shoved Beowulf away and took her turn to try and wake up the girl. "Hey, wake up!" She shook the girl like a rag doll to no avail. "Hey! I told you to get up!" She tried again and again, gaining the same results as Beowulf before her. "Stop ignoring me!" Parasoul finally had it and slapped the sleeping girl trying to get a reaction out of her. But seeing that it was useless, the Princess grew more frustrated and started slapping the girl even more. "Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!"

"Stop it! Stop it, your highness!" Beowulf grabbed the Princess from behind and put her in one of his many holds. "Calm down!"

On her part, Carol grabbed Peacock's body and helped her sit down only to realize a horrible truth. "GUYS! Peacock's not breathing!"

"WHAT?!" was the mutual response of the two adults in the boat.

Carol then proceeded to check on Peacock's pulse by pressing her index and middle fingers on the girl's neck, only to find none. "She… She's dead."

"Dead?" Beowulf asked as he finally let go of the Princess who had completely calmed down after hearing the news. "How? When? Why?"

"I'm no medical expert…" She had received training from Dick Grayson, arguably one of the Loop's best detectives around, who had taught her how to make a prognosis regarding someone's death. "We have to wait until we can do an autopsy but I think she died… because of this trip."

"How's that possible?" Beowulf questioned since it sounded like a ridiculous assumption. "Did the salt in the air kill her or something?" he asked.

Carol sighed and shook her head.

"No. I think Peacock died… out of boredom."

7.14 MaracaRin

When the citizens of New Meridian came to one of Beowulf's wrestling matches, there was a certain crowd to be expected. It was mostly the Wulfpack, with some people showing up for fun.

But no one ever expected *Princess Parasoul* to show up. What's more, she talked to the canine wrestler like they were old friends! They weren't the only ones surprised, however.

"You'd have to be pretty Loopy to show up here, Princess." Beowulf raised an eyebrow at the royal guest.

Parasoul merely grabbed a cup of tea out of her Pocket and sipped it. "Well, seeing as Marie and Peacock are off systematically slaughtering the entire Medici mafia, I figured I should take this opportunity to talk to the only other person Awake," she responded.

Beowulf's eyebrow rose higher. "Isn't Eliza Aw-"

"Other than her."

"Gotcha. Just saying."

After a moment of silence, the princess realized the entire arena was watching and listening in. She quickly dragged the wrestler away.

"Ow-hey, watch it!" he yelled, "what was that for?"

"Do you WANT everyone in the city to know?"

"Know about wha-oh yeah, right. I'll shut up now."

They were inside Parasoul's pocket. While not huge yet, it had at least enough space for a friendly spar.

"Y'know, I've been wondering something," Beowulf said after they had finished. Parasoul looked at him strangely.

"And what would this 'something' be?"

"Well, I was just thinking, isn't it weird that we were the next ones to activate?"

"...how so?"

"Well, I think I heard Peacock say that Loopers start if they're close to people already Looping. And I guess you're the princess, so everyone loves you, and I'm Beowulf," he howled to punctuate his statement, "but we're not really close to Peacock, Ben, or the others."

The princess had to think for a second. "How... uncharacteristically observant of you," she responded.

"Hey, I may not be the smartest, but a wrestler's gotta notice things to get the upper hand on opponents."

"Right..." Parasoul said sarcastically. Still, she couldn't help but think about what he had said. "And what do you think the implications of this thought are?"

"Dunno. Maybe there's someone me or you know that's Looping without the rest knowing. That's probably not right, though."

Somewhere, out in space, a starbound girl sneezed.

The next day...

"SCANDAL: PRINCESS IN SECRET RELATIONSHIP WITH FAMOUS WRESTLER?"

Parasoul groaned. The rest of the Loop was going to be a nightmare.

7.2 (con't) XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Blazblue]

Meanwhile on a parallel dimension/universe adjoined to the world of the Skullgirl, two figures were watching the whole thing amusedly.

"Well, that was fun while it lasted," Venus said as she finished the last of her popcorn. "Did you get what you wanted?" She turned to her sister Aeon who was squishing and squeezing her new red vampire bat 'plushie' and fumbled with the new black cat umbrella.

"Oh, I got more than these souvenirs. I also got these." Aeon said as she took out some extravagant pink colored glasses.

"Are those…?"

"The spectacles of Eros!" Aeon said giddying like a little girl. "You know how much fun we can have with these?" Then with a wave of her hand she produced even more spectacles. "Especially when I get these one-use-only unreproducible copies to our fellow Eldritch Deities?"

"We can get Crack-ship Harem Loop footage from across all the Multiverse!" Venus said, excited at the prospect. "But why just one-use-only?"

"Because we don't want others making copies or use them so many times they get them banned forever, it would ruin the fun!" Aeon explained.

"Ah, I see!" Venus nodded in understanding. "So! Shall we test one of them with our world?"

"You know it! And I have the perfect candidate! But we will have to wait after Rachel Alucard returns to her Loop."

"She's proven to be immune to them and she might ruin our fun." Venus deduced earning a nod from her sister. "By the way, did you notice that Beowulf isn't in this loop?"

"Huh? That's strange." The goddess of time really hadn't noticed at all. "He probably ended up on another Loop."

Meanwhile in Ronin-Gai, a small town inside 13th Hierarchical City of Kagutsuchi, two fierce warriors were locked in a fierce battle.

"CHUG! CHUG! CHUG! CHUG! CHUG! CHUG! CHUG! CHUG!" The crowd of several color-coded ninja chanted as they watched both

fighters gulp down large amounts of beer. "CHUG! CHUG! YEAH!"

"It's a tie!" announced the official judge.

"You know Bang, you are one crazy SOB, but you are my kind of SOB!" Beowulf said at his newest eternal rival as he offered his fist for a fist bump.

"You too, wolf, you too." Bang Shishigami answered as he to offer his fist. "You truly are a bro!"

"And you are the bro-iest!"

And with that the two shared the manliest of fist bumps.

7.15 CrazyCog

[Skullgirls][JJBA]

Rolling on By

An ebony hand reached for freedom, only to be denied when a yellow boot came stomping down on it. The disembodied arm wiggled around, trying to generate enough force to escape, but that just led to an amused chuckle from its captor. Bending down, DIO firmly grasped the arm in his right hand before stepping off of it. Turning around, he manipulated the arm so that it moved in a chiding motion at the disembodied head lying on the ground. "That was very naughty of you to try and go for help. You have done this so many times before, yet you never learn." Ignoring the glare that Ms. Fortune sent him, he continued, "But I suppose that it is to be expected, with you not possessing the gift of Yggdrasil." His free hand reached towards Ms. Fortune, ready to...

"'S'cuse me bub, but do you have a permit for that?"

Suddenly, DIO was three meters away for the spot that he had been standing. Right next to the space that had occupied him was a short figure wearing a mustache, glasses, and carrying a briefcase. "What is it that you want?"

"Well, I thought it would be obvious!" DIO gave a slight jolt as the person was right next to him again. "Everyone knows that you can't be hunting cat girls without a permit!"

"I see." DIO raised an eyebrow. While he could easily crush the person in front of him in less than a second, the Joker had taught him the value of not crossing any regulatory organization. "And how would one go about acquiring this... permit?"

The mustached enigma waved an arm with strange eye shaped protrusions dismissively. "Oh, that's easy, just sign here and here and here..." Paper after paper was shoved into DIO's hands, causing him to relinquish his grasp on the arm (which started to inch away as fast as it could). Fumbling for a pen to finish all of this with, the vampire could only find knives on his person. Noticing his dilemma, the figure grabbed out a large pen. "Don't worry, you can use mine." So caught up with his paperwork, DIO was unaware to the suspiciously sparking rope on the end of the pen getting smaller and smaller.

Rubbing the extremely blunt tip of the pen over one of the papers, he frowned as no ink was being dispensed. "I believe that this pen has run out of..."

KA-BOOOOOOOM!

Blinking twice, DIO found himself covered in soot along with one of his hands missing. Although it regenerated in an instant, he still felt a spark of rage form inside of him. "Who dares to try and hurt DIO!"

Grabbing the mustache and glasses, the person smirked. "You thought that it was a normal permit salesperson, BUT IT WAS I, PEACOCK." The girl ripped the 'disguise' off and pointed

dramatically at him. "And you, DIO, are going to pay for what you have done!"

Recognition finally dawned on DIO's face. "I see, you are one of the nuisances that Eliza has informed me of." He looked her up and down. "I was expecting someone a little more... intimidating." The World appeared behind him. "Although I believe that I do have some time to play. It is quite enjoyable crushing insolent spawn with my fists."

Pulling out her gun, Peacock pointed it at him. "And I enjoy turning the atmosphere to chocolate, but we can't always do what enjoy can we?"

DIO chose not to answer, instead launching himself towards the toonish girl.

Ms. Fortune was not having a good day. In fact, it was a particularly rotten one. First she had woken up on the wrong side of the bed, then she found out that there was no more milk left, causing her to go out and get some. Of course the line at the market was extremely long, and the cashier spent way too much time checking out her scars and not her items. By the time that she had left the sun was completely covered by the clouds, and then she was attacked by some weirdo who acted like they had met before.

Yep, worst day ever, but hopefully not her last. Focusing on pulling her scattered body back towards her, she found herself catching glimpses of the battle when it was not obscured by objects blocking her line of view. The man was somehow attacking the little girl with an invisible force, but to her credit she just twisted and turned out of the way of each attack in impossible ways. Soon, the girl went on the offensive as a tail of eyes sprouted from her and hundreds of lasers shot towards the man, who just threw a car in the way. While most of the vehicle was shredded, the frame was intact enough to still cause some damage if it hit. Ms. Fortune would have rubbed her eyes if she had her hands due to the sight of the girl somehow compressing

her entire height to duck into her hat. Popping right back out, she responded in turn by spinning around an anvil with arms and legs around before throwing it. Due to a leg being tied to it, she was pulled along for the ride. The anvil crashed into the unseen force and seemed to grapple with it, which left the strange girl free from fly past and kick the man in the face.

The cat girl was forced to look away for a few moments as one of her arms dragged her torso back to her. With the other arm close behind, it didn't take long to reattach both the arm and her head, leaving her with only her legs missing. That was when she heard the shout.

"Enough!"

Covered in Golden Energy, DIO had a look on his face that was less than pleased. His hair full of glitter and his clothes dyed pink, he looked like a complete and utter buffoon. He was tempted to use The World to take care of her there and then, but his pride stated that he did not need to go all out in order to defeat her. Despite her annoyances, she was no Jotaro. Already, he could see that she was beginning to tire, her chest visibly moving in order to pull in more oxygen. It wouldn't take much more to finish her off, and he knew exactly how to go about that.

Before Peacock's eyes, DIO disappeared, leaving her alone on the street (besides the cat girl desperately willing her legs to hurry the heck back).

Lighting a cigar, the girl looked around, trying to locate her opponent. Seconds passed, but she did not drop down her guard, eyes peeled for any movement. Suddenly, her senses screamed to look up. Eyes turning skyward, she was greeted with the sight of DIO descending towards her while holding a steamroller in his hands shouting, "THIS IS THE END FOR YOU!"

Despite the incoming attack, Peacock just smiled before she jumped into the air and shouted three words, "ROAD ROLLA DA!" Reality

twisted as Peacock's aura spread, summoning a steamroller of her own and causing toonish physics to leak into reality. The bottoms of the machines collided in midair, the force of the impact turning both vehicle's trajectories horizontal before hanging there, motionless. The sound of grinding rock could be heard as both forces fought to be dominant, but only one could succeed.

Having dealt with worse reality shifts, DIO quickly recovered from the disorientation. "Hm... You're using my own attack on me? Like a losing player at a video game tournament you are trying to use one of my own moves in hope that it will surprise me?" DIO tilted his head back and gave a mocking laugh. "How USELESS USELESS USELESS!"

Rolling her eyes, Peacock seemed completely unfazed by DIO's taunts, and the fact that they were both standing sideways in opposite directions. "Hey bub, don't knock it 'till you tried it! Besides, what is more embarrassing than beating someone with their own finishing move?"

There was a moment of silence after that, before both of them shot into action, DIO alone on his side, Avery and Peacock both punching on theirs.

Of course DIO opened up with the usual shout of, "MUDA! "

Peacock's battle cry was much less serious, "BANG! POW! BLAM! KAZAM! PUNCH NOISE! WHAM! SLAM! TIM TAM! JAM! KAPOW! KABLOOEY! KABOOM! WHACHOW! ZAP! BAP! SLAP! MAP! WHAP! CRACK! SNAP! WRAP! RO! SHAM! BO! SHMO! DING! DONG! BING! BONG!"

Both steamrollers started to crumple against each other, the force of the attacks leaving them with no other option. DIO reared up with a

shout of, "WRYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!" before slamming his fist down one more time.

At the same time, Peacock let out a cry of, "SPOOOOOOOOON!" before grabbing a large hammer out of nowhere and returning the favour, Avery mirroring the gesture with his wings.

For a second, nothing occurred as the momentum of the attacks struggled against each other for dominance. All of a sudden, Peacock's steamroller shot off and smashed into a building, taking the poor girl along with it. Dropping to the ground, DIO let out a harsh laugh as his own steamroller crashed next to him. "It seems that the little pest has been taken care of." Looking back to the partially reformed Ms. Fortune, he took a step forward...

CRASH

Only to suddenly be standing two meters to the right where the crumpled remains of Peacock's steamroller now jutted from the ground. Turning around, his eyes slightly widened as he took in the sight of a 2D Peacock standing in the hole that her impact made with the building. Arms outstretched in front of her, the girl slowly folded forward before fluttering towards the ground like a piece of paper. As soon as she was fully down, the girl lifted her thumb to her mouth and blew, causing an audible pop to sound as she filled back out. The girl smiled at DIO as she cracked her back. "I ain't had a good massage like that since I last visited Olga. That woman might have the physique of a bear, but she sure knows how to hit those good spots."

DIO chuckled in response, although there was a twinge of hesitation in it, "So you live? No matter, soon you will be lying on the ground, groveling for your pathetic life while I, DIO show you what true pain is." Lifting a hand full of knives, he continued while his stand materialized behind him, "Prepare yourself, for THE WORL..." His shout was cut off by a streak of light slicing through the air, and his neck. As the streak continued off into the distance, the vampire stood frozen in mid-shout. Then, his head slowly slid off of his body before

plopping to the ground. Looking up, he noticed that Peacock was now standing over him. With his regeneration suppressed for some strange reason, he could only say, "I don't suppose that this would be a good time to ask for mercy?"

The manic smile on Peacock's face as she held an anvil in her hands answered his question for him.

-One extremely violent beatdown later that is also strangely enough able to be shown on television-

Watching as DIO's head sailed over the horizon, Peacock suddenly found herself blindsided by a finally reformed Ms. Fortune tackling her into a hug. "Thank you so much for saving me! I thought that I was a goner back there."

Peacock rubbed the back of her head as the cat girl rubbed her cheek against the toon's, "Uh... I actually did that 'cause he took the last croissant at my favorite café, but you're welcome I guess?"

Meanwhile, off in the distance Annie could be found grumbling to herself as she searched through the rubble of a destroyed building, "Stupid special attack causing stupid sword to fly off at light speed causing stupid amounts of property damage along the way." As she pushed another piece of rubble to the side, she looked to her familiar, "Make a note, 'Never attempt to copy special moves from Kamina of all people... EVER!'"

Compiler's commentary

7.1: Just because somebody starts looping doesn't mean they're going to get an explanation right away.

7.2: In which a vampire and a werewolf are welcomed to the multiverse by a lich and it is awesome.

7.3: Some worlds take competitive wrestling very seriously.

7.4: Welcome to the-whoops, we just missed the princess. Oh well, we'll explain things next time!

7.5: Fans will be fans, no matter what happens.

7.6: Parasoul is going to need a LOT more booze, trust me.

7.7: There are certain unwritten assumptions when it comes to criminal justice. Peacock, obviously, has never read them.

7.8: The Skullgirls Loopers are kind of desensitized to the whole... horror thing.

7.9: Could you ask for a better babysitter? ...Very probably, yes.

7.10: And babysitting them could also be difficult.

7.11: One's a prim and proper lich. One's a mutilated cyborg. Parasoul should not have been surprised.

7.12: And on that day, Beowulf learned never to underestimate an opponent.

7.13: Now, see, if they'd gone fishing in a tributary this would never have happened!

7.14: Sometimes, it takes a simple mind to stumble on a simple truth. Sometimes.

7.15: Always go with the crazy plan. Nobody ever plans for crazy.

And if you, dear reader, should wish to contribute your own snip, you are welcome to join us on the Indie Games Infinite Loops thread over on Spacebattles.

Let's Meet Someone New!

A new friend in the loops is almost always a thing worth celebrating. But at times, the introduction can be a bit... complicated.

8.1 Wildrook

Parasoul could feel a migraine coming when she looked at the picture on the Internet.

It was a car in the middle of the Dairy Queen from a helicopter somewhere in America.

The migraine, however, involved several reasons:

One, that was HER car covered in the blood of the Medici;

Two, her car crashed into a Dairy Queen;

And three, there were no Dairy Queens in the Canopy Kingdom.

Only one mind in this section of Yggdrasil could come up with something that was this ludicrous, and that would mean she met up with a pen-pal of hers who called himself The Crimson Fucker, which... was horrifying alone due to the whole Nazi Vampire thing, but that was another story for another time.

Something had to be done.

"Get her on the phone," was what she muttered. "Someone get her on the phone. I want that damned gremlin on the phone right now!"

8.2 MaracaRin

[Skullgirls][Neon Genesis Evangelion]

It was hard being the Anchor of an entire reality, alongside being the protector of a world inside the reality. As the Loops progressed, it could get repetitive quickly. Sure, the attacking forces were usually Variable, and there was occasionally a Fused Loop (like that one time when the freaking Eggman Empire *from space* showed up), but it usually didn't equate to much enjoyment.

Because of this, Annie was getting rather bored. But she couldn't risk the weirdos discovering her, she had to make everything Baseline. So unlike every other anchor, Loops where she was the only one Awake were a relief for her; finally getting a chance to do something non-baseline felt great.

Annie looked down at the world as LCL covered every continent and ocean. It worked in Tokyo-3, after all.

8.3 XeroM52

Carol was walking down the streets of Maplecrest, a suburb neighboring New Meridian, towards school with her Cello case on her hands, with Buer Drive was stored inside a fake bottom. She had Awoken several days before she was supposed to be kidnapped by Valentine. On one hand she was glad she hadn't Awoken already inside the lab in the middle of an experiment; on the other hand, it was hard for her to see her parents talk and act normal around her when she clearly remembered their screams of fear and hatred directed at her.

'That hasn't happened… yet.' She reminded herself of that. Sure, her parents loved her now, but what would happen if they discovered that her current appearance was just a façade and that her face was really filled with horrible scars, or that her insides were replaced by a parasite that sprung metallic needles from beneath her flesh?

'They'll surely treat me like a freak once again…' It was a sad reality of her world. Parasite hosts were seen as freaks of nature and were discriminated against, even by Ferals who also suffered from racial discrimination on a more subtle level.

'Not to mention the fact that I'm a girl…' Her world also suffered from gender inequality. Women in general were seen with distrust, not only by men but by other women as well, since every woman, be they child or adult, had the possibility to become a Skullgirl if they were to find the Skullheart. This meant that every single woman was a possible nuclear weapon ready to explode at any second.

'I encompass almost all the taboos in my world.' If somehow she managed to become a Feral and a Skullgirl, she would complete the whole set. But she couldn't let those thoughts bring her down. She had come a long way since Dick, Raven, and Big Band helped her overcome her issues with herself, and now she had something to look forward to.

'I may not like this world of mine and that's okay.' Because of the Loops, there were better places she could see and live in. Places with people who accepted her by what she was despite looking like she did on the outside, like Ben.

'Ben…' He was the only one she counted on and trusted beyond all things. The rest of the Loopers of her world were fine but she couldn't exactly form a connection with them.

Peacock was too crazy and random for her tastes, not to mention her violent tendencies were a bad influence for Carol; Marie was fine on her own, despite being a Skullgirl, but since she spent most of her time with Peacock it was difficult for Carol to establish a friendship; Beowulf was a nice guy but frankly they couldn't relate to each other well; with Parasoul, Carol had the same problem, with her being so strict and formal all the time, not to mention the title as a princess and the fact that she was Carol's 'ruler' made Carol feel intimidated by her.

And Eliza… well, the least said about her the better.

The only other people she could somewhat relate to were her classmates, with 'somewhat' being the key word. It was difficult for most loopers to keep up certain relationships before they become repetitive and boring, but for Carol her status as a looper coupled with her social anxiety made it difficult for her to get along with her classmates. Except for one…

"Good morning, Filia!" Carol greeted her classmate and friend when she saw her walking down the same street towards school.

Filia had been her closest friend before Valentine and the whole Lab 0 experimentation; after that when they met again with Carol been the Painwheel, Filia seemed to have lost her memories of their friendship. It took Carol several Loops to understand what happened to Filia. It turned out that she had accepted becoming the host of a parasite named Samson and had her memories erased. Carol still didn't understand the reason why Samson erased her memories, but she had the sneaking suspicion it was because Filia was related to the Medici. In fact, she was the granddaughter of Lorenzo Medici, the head of the Medici Mafia.

But despite this, Carol made an effort to be Filia's friend since Filia had been hers when Carol was nothing but a wallflower, back in baseline. Although she had to admit that pre-Samson Filia acted similarly like those popular girls in those High School flicks she had seen in other loops, except she wasn't mean or cold-hearted.

"Oh, h-hello, Pai—I mean, Carol! How are you doing today?" Filia greeted back sounding somewhat anxious, something that was out of character for her, not to mention the sun hat she was wearing covering her entire hair from view.

"Filia…? Is there something wrong?" the brunette asked her friend, concerned by her strange behavior. "And why are you wearing that hat?"

"Oh! I-It's nothing, really!" Filia said as she waved her arms in front of her. "I just…I'm having a bad hair day, that's all!"

"Bad…hair day?" Now that was definitely suspicious. Filia never had a bad hair day, and even if that really was the case, she would've refused to even leave her home. "Filia…? Why are you lying to me?"

"What? I'm not lying to you!" she said, acting defensively, "I swear to you Pain…CAROL! I meant Carol!" she corrected herself.

But it was too late.

"Painwheel…" Carol whispered in a low tone. "That's what you were about to call me, isn't it?"

Filia flinched back.

"Filia…you-" Before she could even finish, Filia quickly turned around and tried to flee away from Carol. The ASG unit prevented her from doing so, grabbing her by the arm. "Filia!"

"Don't you dare put your hands on her!" said a deep masculine voice coming directly from Filia. "Back off!" From beneath her sunhat, Filia's hair flowed out and started moving on its own trying to attack Carol, forcing her to let go of Filia's arm.

"No! Samson don't!" Filia tried to plead-but it was too late, her now black hair was completely free, exposing the parasite that had taken residence on top of her head.

"Don't be fooled! She is still the same monster!" Samson accused angrily. "I can feel that horrid synthetic parasite coursing through her veins!"

"No! Filia, don't listen to him!" Carol said, ignoring the 'monster' insult and focusing on her friend. "I know things are confusing right now, but I can expl-"

"It must be a trick!" Samson interrupted. "We have to get out of here, kid!"

Filia, in her state of confusion, did what Samson told her and started to flee again.

"Filia!" Carol shouted after her, but it was useless. "I need to inform the others…we have a new Looper."

8.4 XeroM52

Parasoul Renoir, Princess of the Canopy Kingdom, was sitting on a local bar drinking heavily after a particularly stressful Fused Loop. Since it would be improper for her to be seen drinking this way by her subjects, she was wearing a clever disguise in order to blend in with the rest of the patrons.

After several drinks, and turning down several guys who wanted to 'get to know her', a large figure approached and sat right next to her.

"Bad Loop?" asked none other than Big Band, the mechanical man made out of musical instruments.

"Just very stressful…" Parasoul commented as she downed another drink. "It put my leadership skills to the test."

"Wanna talk about it?" Big Band asked. After more Loopers showed up he kind of was the one everyone told their problems to. He didn't mind too much; it was a job someone had to do and it might as well be him.

"It was very political… I don't want to bore you with the details or we'll be here all night and probably all morning too," the disguised princess said. "Let's just said I 'won' World War 2."

"Yes. I can see how that could be stressful. How did you help the Allies win?"

"I didn't help the Allies; I help Germany win the war," Parasoul revealed, much to the surprise of Big Band. "I know it is controversial, but hear me out."

Now this story he was really curious about. "...I'm all ears."

"You see, when people see National Socialism, most people instantly think of the 'Ideology of Evil' and whatnot and I agree to a certain point. But beneath the fascism, scientific racism and anti-Semitism that everyone knows it for, NS started with a simple idea. Volksgemeinschaft."

"People's community?" Big Band repeated questioningly.

"The idea of breaking down elitism and uniting people across class divides to achieve a national purpose," Parasoul explained. "A cute concept that held a lot of potential… a shame it got buried under all the hatred and the stupidity that is the idea of a 'Master Race'."

"So I'm guessing you didn't let that happen," Bing Band said, knowing Parasoul wouldn't help Germany win if they were under the 'ideology' of evil.

"That is correct. I took the concept of Volksgemeinschaft and help it focus on a more positive and constructive direction," Parasoul said proudly. "Of course there were tough times, but with the proper leadership and motivation we pull through and managed to economically recover far quicker than the rest of the countries that were involved in World War 1."

"That sounds good," BB commented, though he knew this wasn't it just yet. "But... What caused the Second World War?"

"Well, Germany was doing so well on its own that other countries wanted to annex to it or open friendly negotiations of commerce. But

as you might have imagined, the Allies didn't like it one bit. So one thing led to another, and… well, you know how it goes." Really it was all the same dance but with a different tune, each time. "Then it all came down to an arms race… which we won." German engineering and technology was really number one. "We developed the atomic bomb first."

"Did... Did you…" BB began nervously.

"Once. On an unpopulated area so no one was hurt," the Princess declared. "After that demonstration of power, the Allies admitted defeat. Then I was the first in line in signing a world treaty which prohibited the creation of more of those bombs. That, in a nutshell, was how I made Germany and its allies win WW2."

"That's quite the tale," BB admitted. Most people would usually just fight for the allies, but Parasoul managed to make National Socialism work, or at least a heavily modified version of it. "By the way, what did you ended up calling this new ideology?"

"My, my, quite enthralled in my tale, don't you?" Parasoul asked teasingly.

"Well, it is intriguing." Big Band fully admitted. "So are you going to tell me, your highness?"

"Well if you really want to know…you might just have to read it in my book," Parasoul said as she took a book out from her subspace pocket. "Here, enjoy."

Big Band accepted it and read the title. "Hn. Cute." Well, he now knew what would occupy his time for this Loop, this book titled…

"My Canopy."

8.5 Masterweaver

Parasoul tapped her pen against the paperwork thoughtfully. She was settling into a pattern in these time loops: Wake Up and head straight to the cathedral, kill Double and Marie (if she wasn't Awake), put the Skullheart in a high-security safeguarded by her best men, work to crack down on corruption. That last bit usually involved reopening the ASG lab paperwork and absorbing them into Egret special forces-the lab 8 kids usually liked being set on the Medici mafia, even without Peacock's unnerving enthusiasm, and handing them Carol (after executing Brain Drain for crimes against humanity) motivated them to put aside their internal differences as she recovered.

Of course, that presupposed that Carol wasn't Awake. She had been, this loop-as evidenced by the scattered guts of Double and the gouged corpse of Valentine. Parasoul had found her crouched in the catacombs, thoughtfully examining the Skullheart in her hand.

"...Carol. I'll need to take that from you."

The girl sighed. "I was hoping Ben would be the other one Awake this time..." She stood, dutifully handing over the dark artifact. "I... want to see where you put that. Want to make sure..."

She trailed off.

"...I'll put you on the list of approved personnel."

"That's... good." Carol sighed, looking into the distance. "He's calling me. He doesn't know you know, he doesn't know we're talking..."

"I can give you a ride."

Something in Parasoul's tone must have caught Carol's attention, with the way she cocked her head. "You're not responsible for him."

"I'm the princess-"

"He was around before you took the throne. You don't have to make amends for your father's mistakes."

Parasoul's breath caught for a moment. Without a word, she strode for the stairs; she didn't acknowledge Carol's growl of a sigh, nor did she respond to the patter of her footsteps joining her. She did pause when she reemerged in the cathedral, though, taking in the guns leveled in her direction.

"I have the Skullheart." She held the artifact out. "Stand down."

One of the soldiers glanced at Carol. "What about... her, ma'am?"

"She's a friendly, she killed the Skullgirl before we arrived. Adam, take the Skullheart. Secure vault, male guards, daily rotation with week-long breaks between shifts."

Her commander took the object warily. "This should be destroyed."

"It has been. Many times. I'd rather know how to rid ourselves of it permanently before wasting unnecessary resources." Parasoul scowled. "And... be careful. You might not be able to trigger the magic, but the Skullheart... *whispers."*

Adam nodded slowly, taking the pre-prepared case and putting the Skullheart inside. "And where will you be, ma'am?"

"...I shall be taking my personal guard and escorting Carol. There are some... loose ends I must attend to. Discretely."

"Of course."

"If you could inform Umbrella I will be back before the day is out, I would be most appreciative."

"I'll do that, ma'am."

Carol followed after Parasoul, joining her in the black-armored Mercedes and nodding to the Egret that shut the door after her.

"They keep looking at me," she noted with a wry smile. "Haven't taken their eyes off. I don't think they trust me."

"You're a strange woman I found in the recently emptied lair of the Skullgirl, and I'm apparently giving you special treatment right off the bat. They have every reason to be suspicious."

"Mmm."

"Where is Brain Drain?"

"North... third district. Abandoned warehouse."

Parasoul nodded, tapping a button. "Driver, take us to the north side of the city, the third district." She folded her hands onto her lap as the car jolted to a start.

For a moment, they were quiet.

"...I... I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that about your father, he-"

"You weren't wrong," Parasoul said flatly. "Franz's warmongering is well-known, and his methods were... a little extreme."

"...Even if he made mistakes... he's still your father."

"...Yes he is."

The silence returned, settling in the car to the rhythm of rolling tires and surrounding motorcycles.

"You are... lucky to have somebody who cares for you, though."

Parasoul glanced at Carol.

"I'm sorry, I..." She looked away, keeping her expression hidden behind her stitched mask. "It's just... my parents..."

The princess's eyes fell, alongside her face. She looked at her hands, folded in her lap.

"...They didn't recognize you."

"Maybe. But that doesn't mean it doesn't hurt."

"I... could tell them-"

"That's not guaranteed to work," Carol said dryly. "Back when I first started looping, Ben would... sometimes tell them he found records of what happened, explain how I'd been... explain what happened. Sometimes they were sympathetic... but sometimes they just couldn't handle it. Handle me. I... no. They loved me before, but now?" She shook her head. "They lost their daughter. I'm not going to give them a monster back."

Parasoul could have pointed out that, maybe, she was just afraid of rejection. But... she didn't. Somehow, she thought it wouldn't help.

Instead, she cleared her throat. "...I have made it a regular responsibility to handle Brain Drain in the loops. If you would like to discuss tactics-"

"Not really. When... when I kill, when I think about that sort of thing, it's... subconscious. I can't put it to words, really." Carol hugged her arms. "I... prefer it like that. Quick, get through it."

"Right."

"...you take care of Brain Drain?"

"Yes."

"Not Valentine?"

Parasoul sighed. "Realpolitik, I'm afraid. The last survivor of Last Hope, playing triple agent... if I start out going after the Skullgirl,

she's smart enough to backstab Double and leverage her loyalties to keep herself off the chopping board."

Buer Drive swished as Carol growled. "I hate that."

"I know. If you aren't Awake, I give Ben your file and tell him to... bring you into the Lab 8 family."

"I can... see that working. But..."

Carol trailed off, wringing her hands.

"...but you don't want to fight."

She nodded.

Parasoul contemplated her, quietly, for a moment or two.

"...do you have anywhere to go?"

"No... I usually just room with whoever's Awake, but... if you don't want to-"

"It wouldn't be a burden," Parasoul assured her. "I just worry about loops where you're the only one Awake."

"I..." Carol considered. "Well, that... I..."

She trailed off.

"...I guess I could just spend the bones to pay for an apartment or something."

"You have money?"

"...not at the start of a loop. And I guess... I don't really get paid for my work. Maybe I can just find some abandoned building to squat in."

Parasoul frowned. "There are many problems with our world. Human trafficking, child soldiers, rampant warfare and murder... homelessness-"

"I don't think anyone expects you to fix everything."

"I'm the princess. It's my job to try."

"Well... even if you do help me out this loop, how is it going to carry over? You can't expect me to just put a house in my subspace pocket."

Parasoul allowed herself a devious smirk. "A house, no. A key, though..."

8.3 (con't) XeroM52

In the underground laboratory where human weapons were created to combat the Skullgirl, Big Band received a distressed call from Carol.

"Ben, we have to do something! Filia, she is Looping!" she revealed anxiously to the detective. "And she's very confused, she ran away and I don't know where to find her!"

"Don't you worry, I'm on the case," Big Band reassured Carol. "Try looking around without attracting too much attention to yourself." He knew the girl could do it, she had trained directly under Dick Grayson and he taught her well. "I'll see if the Princess can help us with the search."

"Thank you Ben! If you find Filia, please be gentle with her," Carol pleaded. "I know you distrust her for her last name, but… she's still my friend and I want to help her like she helped me."

"Understood," BB answered honestly. "Now, I'll go meet the Princess. And you. little lady, you better take care and don't get in trouble."

"Thanks Ben, I will. And thanks for being there when I need you."

"No need for that. Now let's go find this friend of yours." And with a final goodbye, Big Band hung up the phone.

On the streets of New Meridian, Filia mixed and hid within the population, trying to avoid Painwheel, or anyone for that matter, finding her. While she did this, the runaway girl kept on pondering her situation.

"I still don't get it Samson, why are we in the past?" Filia asked the parasite that posed as her hair. "And what was it that Carol wanted to say?"

"I don't know, kid," Samson answered with that gruff voice of his. "If anything, this could be a trick being pulled by that accused heart."

"I don't know…"

This all felt too real to be an illusion, so this was definitely the past. But why would the heart do such a thing? Why send them back in time?

Filia couldn't come up with anything that made sense, and before she could share her thoughts with Samson, the black parasite spoke up. "Quick, hide!"

Filia did what Samson said and took cover inside an alleyway. From there she observed a small patrol of Black Egrets going around with a poster with a picture of her on it.

"Excuse me, ma'am! Have you seen this person?" one Black Egret asked a passing woman while showing her the poster.

"Sorry, I haven't," was the woman's response.

"Thank you for your time, ma'am," the soldier said before he moved along asking other people if they have seen Filia.

The wanted girl remained hidden until the Black Egrets moved away looking someplace else.

"Those soldiers, they were looking for me?" Filia said as fear began to overtake her senses. "Why would the Black Egrets be looking for me? What do they want with me!?"

"Kid! Calm down!" Samson ordered. It would be bad if Filia fell into hysterics. "I don't know why they're looking for us, but losing our cool will not help us at all. We have to find a place to hide for a while, and then we can investigate what the hell is going on."

"Ok, Samson," Filia said, sounding a lot less anxious. "But where can we hide?"

"Oh! I don't think that would do you any good now," a shrill voice said behind them.

The duo jumped in surprise. "Who the hell are you?" Samson demanded, rather angry at all this persecution crap.

"I?" the small figure asked as it revealed itself. "My name is Peacock, I'm an ASG unit and I've been tasked to look all over for you."

Well, more like forced her way into the job…

8.6 XeroM52, Wildrook

"PEACOOOOOOOOOOCK!"

The yell of anger and frustration of the crowned Princess from inside her office was heard all over the Canopy Kingdom.

"Hey, it's not my fault!" Peacock said. "You were the one to told me to play with more 'healthy' toys."

Still, that didn't explain where the convenience store that didn't exist in their world had come from and why they were suing the Royal Family for property damages.

Parasoul sweat-dropped. "Mental note," was what she muttered. "It's now illegal in the Canopy Kingdom for Peacock to go on very enthusiastic walks when she's bored." She sighed. "Now I know how Sir Hellsing feels when she deals with Alucard with the mentality of Sterling Mallory 'Duchess' Archer."

8.7 Masterweaver

Carol stared up at the broad moon that hovered over New Meridian, Beur Drive drawing small circles on the ground.

"What am I doing...?"

KILL THE SKULLGIRL

She tilted her head, but did not move from her perch atop the gravestone.

OBEY

"Is this all I am?" she asked. "The tragic monster, who slays those that harmed her? I feel..."

KILL THE SKULLGIRL

Carol sighed. "Alright, alright, I'm moving out." She leapt from her perch, wandering toward the cathedral and pushing the doors open. "Let's get this over with."

Inside, as always, waited Double and Valentine. Carol shut her eyes; Painwheel opened them. In less than a minute, both eldritch and vile laid wounded behind her.

She paused for a moment, turning around and stalking over to the nurse. "You did horrible things to me, you know. You took me from my home and robbed me of my humanity. And for what? To kill the girl you couldn't?"

The woman groaned, pushing herself up on her elbows.

The blades of Beur drive revved up. "I should shred you right now. I want to. I want to plunge these into your stomach and let your blood gush all over this carpet. You deserve so, so much worse for your hypocrisy."

Valentine did not bother to deny it, only staring up defiantly.

"...What happens after this? Did you ever consider that? What do I do after the Skullgirl falls? Go home, as though... as though nothing happened? Get locked up in some cell, waiting for the next one? You... for all your brilliance, conniving, you never think ahead. I hate you. I think I'll always hate you. I don't... want to hate you. I don't want to hate. But you made... this."

Carol sighed, sitting back on her blades. "The pain is dull, now. Or... well, no, it's not dull. It's just... tedious. I feel it, but it doesn't seem to... it's meaningless. It's there all the time, and it's meaningless. Like everything you did. You can say it was to defeat the Skullgirl, but... that was your purpose. Not mine. I don't know..."

The nurse glanced away.

"...you're not worth it. Not now." Carol stood, twisting her neck. "This is Painwheel to Brain Drain. Valentine is at the grand cathedral, working with the Skullgirl. I'm going ahead."

She noted the shocked expression on the nurse's face, and leaned in. "You really want to kill monsters? This is your last chance."

Carol spun around, descending into the catacombs.

It... felt better, this time. Not perfect. But better.

8.3 (con't) XeroM52

"So! We're on the lookout for the Medici Princess herself, huh?" Patricia appeared right out of nowhere next to Big Band after he had hung the phone. "Don't you worry, I'm also taking this case!"

"Patricia…" The detective wanted to admonish her for eavesdropping, but he knew better than to waste his breath. Instead, he decided to make clear what the parameters of the mission were. "We are on the lookout for Filia Medici. It seems that she started to Loop and she's very confused, which means she could be a danger to others or herself. If you are to help, do reconnaissance over New Meridian, and inform me and the Princess of whatever you can find."

"Aye aye, Capt'n!" she answered with a grin.

"And may I remind that no harm should come to her?" he said in a voice that promised bad times if she were to disobey this specific order. "I know of your constant manhunts of the Medici, but this is one I prohibit you to harm!"

"Pfft… Even if I were to do that, what could you even do to stop me?"

It was a good thing Ben knew how to put her in her place."If you do, I'll tell Ileum on you."

"What?! You can't be cereal!" Peacock said shocked. There was no way BB would go to such extremes.

Ileum was the nurse that took care of everyone living in Lab 8, and for that everyone saw her as a mother, Patricia included. Everyone liked her for her kind and caring nature, but also they were terrified of her when someone made her mad. Especially of that 'Look' she gave when someone misbehaved; it sent chills down everyone's spines and made their blood freeze. The look was a reminder that she was a veteran ASG soldier and had fought against the last two Skullgirls before Marie: Selene Continello and Nancy Renoir.

"Very!" BB answered, which made Peacock shy away. "Now promise you won't hurt Carol's friend."

"Fine! I promise!" she said while grumping under her breath.

"Good. Now let's go find her." Unknown to Patricia, beneath Big Band's breather, he sported a triumphant smile. It felt good being able to reel in the uncontrollable Peacock once in a while.

"ASG…? That means…" Filia said as she took a step backward.

"Yep. Anti-Skullgirl Unit. And I'm the best at I what I do," Peacock answered, enjoying the look of terror on Filia's eyes. It felt good to be recognized as the badass she was. "And what I do… well, you don't want to know."

"Anti-S-Skull… GET AWAY FROM ME!" Filia shouted as she backed away from the little girl in the alleyway and into the proper street.

"Hey, hey, no need for alarm. Just come with me and I'll take you back to HQ and-"

Peacock was interrupted mid-sentence by a black drilling tendril that burst out from the ground and almost hit her. "NOW! LET'S BAIL, KID!" Samson ordered as he called back the back tendrils, using them to latch into the buildings above them and pull Filia onto the roofs.

"Yes, Samson!" Filia nodded and started running and jumping from roof to roof, fleeing once more.

Back on the ground, Peacock stood still and watched them go.

"Squawk! Boss, they are getting away!" Avery said as he lifted the hat over Peacock's head. "Are you going to chase them?"

"Of course I will," the ASG unit responded while pulling out one of her imagination-made cigars and smoked it. "I'm just giving them a hefty head start just so it's fair for them!"

"Aren't you going to call the Princess or Big Band about this, squawk?"

"Nah." Patricia shook her head. "It's more fun this way."

8.8 XeroM52

Parasoul bit her nail, a bad habit she developed when she was very worried, which usually meant that Peacock was involved. And this time it wasn't any different. Peacock was tormenting her in the worst possible manner.

By doing absolutely nothing.

Parasoul knew that the little troublemaker was Awake but so far she hasn't done anything, absolutely nothing. No pranks, no meeting interruptions, not even a not-so-anonymous letter demanding for her to step down and give up on monarchy and instead install a republic with Peacock as its first president.

So far the only thing she had done was walk down the local parks with a yellow satchel bag with black markings in tow.

"What's in that bag?" The Princess knew that whatever the gremlin was planning it had to do with whatever was inside that bag. And Peacock knew she knew because the cyborg girl was taunting her by doing nothing while carrying that bag around. It was infuriating.

The mystery of the bag and the anxiety it caused made the Princess suffer a severe case of insomnia. Every time she closed her eyes, she saw horrific visions of what that bag could contain and the destruction it could cause to her kingdom.

"I need to get my hands on that bag!" But as long as Peacock has it with her at all times, it would be almost impossible to get it from her. She needed a distraction! Picking up a phone, she called Adam, her second in command of her elite armed forces. "Adam! Inform the Egrets and have them ready to roll out!"

"Yes, Sir!"

Half a day later, Parasoul looked at the state her elite troops were and sighed. "So none of you could snatch the bag from Peacock?" she asked, disappointed. "Or get the chance to peek and see what was inside?"

"I managed to get the bag and opened it sir!" one of the many beat up Egrets informed while giving a weak salute.

"And?!"

"All I saw was a boxing glove come out and punch me right in the face, sir!"

"I did too!" another Egret soldier said. "But mine got me a pie to the face, and not even a good flavor!"

"What flavor?"asked a third Egret.

"Black Licorice!"

That answered earned him several moans, gags, and even a pat on the back of pity. "That beast!"

"Sir, we tried everything!" Adam said, his uniform completely covered in mud and a fake mustache painted with permanent marker. "I was thrown into the air by a springboard that suddenly appeared underneath me!"

That answered the Princess' unasked question. "It seems that whatever is inside that bag, Peacock really doesn't want us to find out." And that made the redhead princess' curiosity burn even more. "We have to keep trying and look for her."

"HEY KIDS! WANNA SEE A DEAD BODY!?" Peacock shouted as she phased through the wall, making the Egrets scream like little girls.

"Peacock!? What are you doing here?" The Princess took a step backward, surprised by the girl's sudden appearance.

"Well, my ears were burning and so I thought to myself. 'My second favorite princess is talking about me, I better give her a visit!' And that's why I'm here now."

Of all the things she could ask about, she went for the one that caught her attention the most. "Second favorite princess…?"

"Obviously, Season 2 Episode 30 of Annie: Girl of the Stars when Annie gets the platinum star crystal and transforms into Annie the Star Princess, and defeats Galaxia the Space Skullgirl, duh!"

'No argument there,' Parasoul mentally agreed. She even got the Annie the Star Princess Spin and Fly figurine. It cost her around 500 bones, but it was totally worth it.

"Anyway… what was it today for you to send out the Egrets after me?" Peacock asked, snapping Parasoul out of her thoughts.

"Uh… Exercise!" The princess replied, making everyone look at her funny. "The Egrets had been slacking for a while and I thought, 'why not test their mettle against the most awesome person around?' which is you!" Parasoul lied through her teeth, wanting nothing more than to grind them to dust for saying such lies. "Isn't that right, guys?"

She turned to the Egrets with a look that said 'go along with it or else. Everyone reluctantly agreed and mumbled similar responses.

"So? It didn't have anything to do with this right?" Peacock said as she pulled out the yellow source of Parasoul's distress.

"No of course not!" Parasoul denied while keeping her gaze planted on the bag. "Although it is a pretty looking bag." No it wasn't, it was horrible looking, but she needed to play things right. "Mind if I take a closer look?"

"Knock yourself out." Peacock lent her yellow bag to the eager princess. "I got it in my last fused loop. You see I looped as a …"

But Parasoul wasn't hearing anything; she was too focused on the bag on her hands. "Aha! Got it! Now I can see what's inside the bag!" Parasoul then opened it, only to find it utterly empty. "It's empty!?"

"Of course it's empty! Why would it have something inside?" Peacock asked, making a vein appear in the princess' forehead.

"Because it's a bag! Bags carry things inside!" She was losing her patience with the little girl each passing second. "I want to know why you were carrying this thing around everywhere!" Her outburst caused the Egrets to flinch and back away from her highness' rightful fury.

"Because I was testing it before deciding whether or not I should give it as a present for Marie. You see, her birthday is coming up!" Peacock explained rationally.

Parasoul lost all of her previous steam. "A present? You mean this bag is just a plain regular bag and nothing else?" The redhead princess handed off the yellow bag, entirely out of energy to muster any indignation.

"Of course not! If it is a gift to Marie it has to be something special." Peacock grinned. "And this bag certainly is! It's a magic bag!"

"Magic Bag?"

"Yes! From when I looped as this black cat named Felix!" Peacock then started to fold the bag and turned it into a jetpack, which she put on. "Now if you excuse me, I got to fly!" And with a sudden burst of power, Peacock shot out of the room through the ceiling and into the sky above. "Goodnight everybody!"

"Your Highness? Are you okay!" Adam asked as he watched the Princess tremble in place.

Parasoul fall into her knees and shouted towards the night's sky "PEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAACOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOCK!" before slumping over and falling asleep.

8.9 Awesomedude17

Peacock blinked in surprise. "Holy guacamole!"

"What did you find this time, Patricia?" Marie asked.

"There's this fuzzy frog thing that breaks its own toes and uses those bones as claws! My kinda animal!"

Peacock raised a hand, only for Marie to grasp it firmly.

"You're not breaking your fingers just to stab people with your finger bones. Not when we've already got knives."

Peacock crossed her arms and huffed. "Spoilsport."

8.3 (con't) XeroM52

The runaway girl kept on running non-stop, jumping from rooftop to rooftop to put as much distance between her pursuers and herself.

"What are we going to do Samson? Not only do we have the Black Egrets looking for us, now we have an ASG agent after us too." That scared her the most; it meant this wasn't just a lookout for her, it was a deadly manhunt if the ASG labs were involved.

"At the rate things are going, our best option is to flee the country and maybe look for refuge on another kingdom."

"But Samson…!" Filia tried to rebut.

"It's either that or risking capture and being subjected to whatever the ASG labs will do to us! Believe me, you don't want to know what 'surprises' they have for us." It was well known that in the time of King Renoir, he would send prisoners, traitors, or people vocally disapproving of him as king to the Labs to be experimented on.

"You better because this 'surprise' has coconut in it!" Peacock appeared from a 'hole' that suddenly formed on the roof, and with a mighty speed she smashed a cream pie on Filia's face. "Ha! Always a classic!" She laughed as she saw the runaway girl wiping the cream out of her face. "As you can see you can't run away from me, so there are two ways we can settle this: the easy way and the hard way."

"So your way or the highway, huh?" Samson asked as he helped Filia get rid of all the cream. "Well, we choose the railway!" With that,

the Parasite transformed itself into a pair of batwings and made Filia jump off the roof into a train that was passing just below them.

"Damn! That was cool!" Peacock admitted as she watched the train go away with her target. "And it's about to get cooler!" Because fight on top of a moving train was one of the most cinematic places one could have fisticuffs.

On top of the moving train, Filia was slowly getting her breath under control. "Samson! You better warn me the next time you gonna do something like that!"

"Sorry, kid," the hair apologized. "But we can't risk fighting her and having the Egrets gang up on us." Despite how much Samson hated to flee a battle, he knew that it was the smart thing to do if they wanted to fight another day. "The important thing here is that we managed to escape."

"Did you really manage to escape?" Peacock asked as she materialized on the train's roof, surprising the escapee duo. "Poor bastard, don't you hate it when you're wrong?"

Now it was Samson's turn to sound afraid. "Wh-what are you?"

"Just your regular Badass Main Hero, that curb-stomps anything on her path! Now, you refused my kind offer of doing things the easy way, now we do this the hard way!"

"Well, then come and get it, you punk!" Samson dared as he prepared for battle. "Kid, we have no option, we have to defeat her if we want to escape!"

"I understand!" Filia said, determined. "Let's go, Samson!"

8.10 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Mario]

"Princess!" Mario, the famous plumber hero, shouted as he kicked the door to the Mushroom castle. 'And here I thought we could have a nice relaxing Loop!'

Those plans went flying straight to the window when he arrived at the Kingdom and saw large troops of Koopa all over the streets. This wouldn't be out of place any other Loop where Bowser was Unawake, and more evil than normal, except these troops looked way more organized and wore heavily specialized armor that wouldn't look out of place in a fascist regime from the future. The Helghast soldiers came to his mind.

But Mario wasn't called Super Mario for nothing, and he quickly disposed of all the troops that stood his way towards the castle. Although he had to admit, these Koopas did put up a better fight thanks to their heavy armor and weaponry. Still, in the end, the red plumber was triumphant.

"Princess! I'm coming for you!" Mario shout once again as he made his way towards the upper floors where Peach was probably kept in. Once he arrived at the last floor he found a locked door that he kicked open to release the princess from her imprisonment. "Princess!"

"Oh! Hello Mario!" Peach greeted him in a very blasé manner, while sitting at a table drinking a cup of tea. "Would you like to join us?"

"Wha?" Mario uttered, confused. Wasn't her kingdom being invaded and she imprisoned in her castle? But there was another thing that caught his attention. "Us?" He asked as he finally noticed the other occupant in the room. A very tall young woman dressed in a much-decorated suit of armor with a bird motif and sporting very long, flowing red hair.

"So this is the famous Super Mario, Princess Peach was talking so much about," the redhead said as she stood up from her seat,

making her tower over Mario. "My name is Parasoul Renoir and I am the Queen of the Koopa," Parasoul introduced herself as she offered her hand. "It is a pleasure to meet a hero of great stature like you."

"Uh…Th-The pleasure is all mine," Mario said after finally getting over his initial shock and shook hands with Parasoul. "When you say Queen of the Koopa, you mean…"

"She is replacing Bowser, yes." Peach answered. "I too was surprised when I Woke Up to find a letter from the Koopa Queen requesting to talk about a peace treaty and open trade routes for our kingdoms."

"Peace Treaty…?" Mario repeated back somewhat nervously. "So those troops outside…"

"Yes, they are my escorts." Parasoul said nodding. "I can take good care of myself, but they insisted on coming along. And since we were going to be talking privately I decided to let my troops rest and enjoy what the Mushroom Kingdom has to offer." She explained the presence of her military troops. "I hope they didn't cause you too much trouble when entering the castle."

"Trouble, you say?" Mario was sweating bullets at this point, a fact that both rulers noticed immediately.

"Mario…? What did you do?" Peach questioned, similarly to a mother asking her child if he ate all the cookies of the cookie jar.

"I... I thought you were been invaded and imprisoned," Mario admitted. "I didn't know you were in the middle of peace talks." Especially with all the troops marching around the streets.

"You know, this could be considered an act of war," Parasoul pointed out much to the plumber's dread. "But I am willing to overlook this, if you issue a public apology towards my troops and their families."

"I guess…" Mario responded somewhat embarrassed but relieved that he got away with almost starting a war with just that.

"That and no cake for you for two months!" Peach added to his punishment, which was a real low blow for him, but he accepted nonetheless. "Well, now that that is settled," she continued as she turned towards Parasoul. "As a show of appreciation and to celebrate this peace treaty, I wish to invite you, Queen Parasoul, to a sporting event of your choosing."

The announcement earned a surprised look from the redhead.

"It's what we do in our free time," Mario explained. "Every sport and non-sport you can imagine, we had tournaments for."

"In that case…" Parasoul began with a tingle in her eye. "How about a tennis competition? I love tennis!"

"Of course that sounds great!" Peach said excitedly as she clapped her hands. "We can even invite Daisy to join us!" then she turned towards Mario. "Say, is Luigi Awake? Do you think he could go get her at Sarasaland?"

"I'll see what I can do?" Mario informed looking at the cheery Princess who was excited for another competition. *'Luigi isn't awake this time, but I'm sure he can make his way to Sarasaland alone.'* Now that there weren't any Koopa threats around this would be mostly a peaceful Loop.

"Mario! Could I please get another partner?" Luigi pleaded to his big brother.

He was quickly grabbed from behind by said tennis partner. "What are you saying Weegee? We are killing out there!" said none other than Peacock who had looped in, replacing Princess Daisy from Sarasaland. "We make a great team!" she said as he gave the green plumber a noogie.

"Mario! Please help me!"

8.11 Masterweaver

"My, my, my." Eliza smiled, stroking her chin thoughtfully. "The princess herself? What an honor."

"It's unfortunate I'm here on official business."

"Oh?"

"You are one of New Meridian's most upstanding citizens, of course. Your philanthropy and blood-drives are world-famous. So I felt it best to inform you personally of the accusations leveled against you."

Eliza searched Parasoul's face for any hint of deceit, but the princess's years of political training keeping her expression utterly honest despite the brazen lie. "I do hope I'm not being accused of anything... horrible."

"Certainly not. You're being charged with identity fraud."

"...Identity fraud."

"Yes. It would appear that, through what appears to be a clerical error, the files on your citizenship have been determined to be forged. Ordinarily this would result in deportation, but I consider myself to be a kind ruler, and given your standing in the community I believed you would appreciate a chance to assess the situation yourself."

To her credit, Parasoul's face remained completely sincere during the blatant falsehood she was spewing. Eliza allowed herself an amused grin. "Of course, princess. I'm sure this loopy situation will be corrected soon enough."

"I have an entire branch of service to moderate, so I thank you for your cooperation. I assure you that you will receive all the help you deserve while filing the proper paperwork. That said, until this situation is resolved I am afraid some of your assets will be frozen while under investigation."

"Of course. Would I receive any warning about this?"

"Your banks are being informed of the situation as we speak."

Eliza's smile had grown cold. "I see. Of course you will be interviewing the... individuals with whom I am filing my paperwork to ensure they remain on task?"

"Of course. Any deviation from the legal methodology could have severe consequences. Laws exist for a reason."

"That they do, princess. And might I say, I commend you for your clever handling of the situation."

"You are allowed to," Parasoul demurred. "Have a nice day." She turned and walked out of the room.

Eliza tapped the tip of her staff thoughtfully. "And here I thought the youth of today could never be so frustrating as my fellow theons' idyllic resistance to purity."

8.3 (con't) XeroM52

Big Band was currently looking down the city from the highest point he could find: the Medici Tower. Being this high in altitude wasn't exactly his style for searching, but with Parasoul's Egrets on the lookout on ground level, it fell to him do the sky reconnaissance.

"It's kind of peaceful out here," BB couldn't help to comment. Being this high meant that the usual sounds of the city below were very

dim, almost inaudible.

Alas, things this nice didn't last very long.

BOOM!

"That was a big explosion!" Big enough for him to hear from this altitude. What could possibly cause such…?

Who was he kidding, it was obviously Peacock.

"That kid…" He was going to have a long talk with her, and by that, he meant *Ileum* would have that talk with her. "No time to waste!"He jumped from the tallest building of New Meridian, and mid-fall he activated his repulsors and changed into his rocket form, flying towards the explosion.

Peacock and Filia continued their battle despite causing the train they were on to veer off the tracks and explode. Thankfully, Peacock had teleported the passengers out of the train before anyone was hurt. She might have been a comedic psychopath but she did still try to not kill people that didn't deserve it. The passengers that were part of the Medici though, those burned alongside the train.

Currently, their battle had brought the two fighters to the outside of the Grand Cathedral.

Peacock knew that the train exploding would occupy the attention of the Egrets for some time, but BB and the Princess would come directly at them, stopping her fun. "You know, this has been fun and all, but I think it's time to end this. Come on! Time to get serious!" Well, more like time to stop effing around, since she had to keep her promise of not hurting the runaway girl. Mostly, she used gags to made Filia lose her balance and kept her on the move.

"Kid, we need to finish her now or we'll be captured. It is time to use *that,* " Samson said ominously. "It's our only hope."

Filia, who would've refused on any other occasion, just nodded. "Ok!" She really didn't want to but they were running out of options. Taking a deep breath, Filia closed her eyes and prepared herself.

"That hair of yours is really a pain in the butt," Peacock commented. "Why don't I give it a trim?!" She laughed as she jumped into the air and summoned a chainsaw from her hat, which was being held by a green bird dressed exactly like Peacock.

"Here she comes!" Samson took a defensive position while Filia finished preparing.

"Let's go!" Filia said as she opened her eyes, which acquired a different form and coloration. Not only that, she released a pulse of invisible power that stopped Peacock dead in her tracks.

"Marie…?!" Peacock said, completely frozen in shock before she felt a powerful blow to her stomach. It had been more powerful than any other blow she had received from the same girl in any other Loop before.

"Now take this!" Samson morphed into a very large beast with enormous arms and started beating Peacock with his giant fists. The barrage ended when Samson delivered a final strike that sent Peacock through the walls of the cathedral.

"We did it Samson! We beat her."

"Yes, now we have to get out of here!"

But before they could continue with their escape, the gruff voice of the ASG unit stopped them. "Not another step, you!" Peacock said in slight pain as she walked through the whole on the wall her body made. "That power just now… that power was…"

"That which belongs to me," another voice finished for her. A voice belonging to another girl who also walked out from within the

Cathedral. "It seems our runaway managed to get her hands on what she was looking for. A strange event indeed…"

"It... It can't be…!" Filia gasped in terror at the visage of the small white-haired girl. "You can't be…!"

"You recognize me…" the girl said monotonously. "That means you managed to take it away from me."

"I… You… You're supposed to be dead!" Filia managed to say with her voice trembling alongside the rest of her body.

"It certainly must be weird to see the face of the person you just killed, isn't it?" The girl continued to talk in that emotionless tone of hers that sent shivers down Filia's spine. "So tell me… how does it feel to be a Skullgirl, Filia Medici?" Bloody Marie, the current Skullgirl, asked with her big red eyes shining brighter than ever before.

8.12 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][Metroid]

Parasoul awoke inside a spaceship landing in a strange alien planet. "Where am I?" she wondered, concentrating on her in-loop memories to see if she could get a clue.

Apparently, she was a bounty hunter going to the alien planet Zebes in search of a dangerous species that had been stolen from a research center by a group called Space Pirates.

"This is unusual... The Cosmos… I never imagined visiting an alien planet before."

Then again, with the Loops, every world she visited that wasn't her own could be considered an alien planet.

"I guess that means I am an alien too," she said while looking at her own features in a reflective surface. Pinkish skin, green hair and eyes, really exemplified that point. Although there was something that made her slightly uncomfortable.

"Why am I wearing a tight pink leotard? Am I supposed to fight Space Pirates like this?" In her honest opinion, this sort of 'outfit' wasn't fit for combat. The thing was tighter than spandex...

Suddenly another memory popped up and Parasoul brought her hand to her chest where she activated a command. She was enveloped into space armor with a cannon for a hand. Now that she was equipped with proper armor, Parasoul exited her ship ready to defeat those Space Pirates and recover the stolen Metroid.

"Now this fits perfectly for combat. Although I feel kind of naked without Krieg." She reminisced on her parasol-like Living Weapon... and as soon as she mentioned his name she felt a small pulse come from her arm cannon. "Krieg, is that you?" she asked, earning a small pulse as response. "It's nice having you by my side, Krieg."

"Now! Beginning Mission!"

During her exploration of the planet Zebes, Parasoul came upon the leader of the Space Pirates, the dragon-like creature known as Ridley. The one responsible for the theft of the Metroid and the death of the scientists that worked in the research facility where the Metroid was stored. Ridley proved to be a fierce combatant with his aerial strikes and fire breathing, not to mention his resistance to all of Parasoul's suit upgrades and weapons, like missiles and bombs. All except for one thing.

"Krieg! Please cry for me!" Parasoul commanded as she aimed at the flying Ridley who was readying his next attack. "NAPALM SHOT!" From her cannon, she shot a gooey-like substance that stuck to Ridley that he could tear away. "Cry!" she shouted as more and more shots were fired, completely enveloping the flying dragon.

Ridley fell into the ground, trying in vain to tear away from the gooey cocoon he was trapped in. No matter how much he thrashed and screeched he was completely trapped.

Parasoul watched the desperate display with no sympathy whatsoever. "Krieg… Detonate!" she commanded coldly.

The goo-like substance shone for half a second before it ignited and blew up in a fiery explosion. After the smoke and rubble cleared, there were no traces of Ridley remaining.

Parasoul assessed the death of the space dragon, before turning away. "Space Pirate Leader Eliminated. Continuing Mission!"

Another one gone, just one remained. Ridley might have been the one leading the attack to the research center, but it was someone else who gave the order for the attack and wanted the Metroid to clone an entire army of them to destroy the Galaxy, and kill billions in the process. Something that Parasoul was going to stop at all costs.

"I'm coming for you, Mother Brain!"

8.13 Masterweaver

"...so while I'm a sith now, I don't actually have a lightsaber," Marie finished.

Peacock gave a low whistle. "Ya know, Marie, I feel like I should be worried 'bout this, but somehow I ain't. Is that weird?"

"Given the world we hail from?" Marie shook her head. "Light is a rarity in Canopy Kingdom. And what little light there is uses shadow as a tool... as you know quite well."

"Watcha mean, toots?"

"ASG lab eight. Wounded orphans with nowhere else to go, experimented on to become living weapons. By all accounts, it should be... horrific. And yet..." Marie rolled her hand. "Thanks to Ben, and Ilium, and doctor Avian in some small part... you have a home. A family."

"Yeah... they're the right kind of mad scientists." Peacock took a snuff of her cigar. "The kind that actually care for their creations. Not like Brain Drain or Valentine."

Marie nodded in agreement, her fork fiddling with the food in front of her.

"...Patricia, I..."

She swallowed.

"I... want to apologize."

Peacock's eye petals twisted up. "Eh? What for?"

"In baseline... in a number of the ways baseline could go... lab eight is attacked. I..." Marie swallowed. "I think... I might be the one that convinces Valentine to-"

"Don't," Peacock said. "That's baseline, that's... that's you bein' consumed by the Skullheart, it ain't you for real."

"...Isn't it, though?" Marie brought a hand to her chest. "Like it or not, I'm a skullgirl. I'm *the* Skullgirl, actually... the one that's looping. That decision-"

"The last Skullgirl made her wish to stop a war. The one before that wanted to save her family. Double seeks out the desperate... or makes them desperate. Ya should know this."

"I know, but... that doesn't mean it wasn't me. I... I have a stronger will than most skullgirls, even in baseline. The hatred that flowed through me... I was able to think about it. To direct it. I... of all those

who come to oppose me, it is you and Ben who I hurt the most directly. Those hurt by the people who I-"

A gloved hand held hers gently. "Marie, our world is a jive completely off-time. You did horrible things, I did horrible things, Big Band... Big Band got beat up for doin' the right thing. Carol has ta kill to be normal. Beowulf killed a man on accident... Don't think any of us can claim ta be saints, really."

"Patricia-"

"What, you want to make it up to me? You want me ta be mad?" Peacock smirked. "Watcha think I did first time round? Hunted ya down and put ya down, like my job was. You killed my family, I offed you, we're even. Course, if ya ever do that again, yeah, I'll have ta be riled up."

Faint streams of glowing blue light ran down Marie's cheeks. "Patricia... you can't... you can't mean that. I..."

A gloved finger pointed at her apron. "Right in there, Marie, is tha most dangerous thing on our planet. It's the lingering will of a goddess bent on genocide, filled with hate and crafty 'nuff to find exactly the right people to take it. And you know what? You never gave in. Not completely. You got tempted. You slipped up. But you resisted long enough ta make it here, to the loops, where you could make sure there would never be another damn skullgirl after ya. You're right, I think 'bout what happened to doctor Avian and the others, and I get steamed-even if it hasn't happened yet this time, or the time before, or the time before that. I've been watchin' ya, Marie, cause that's what I was built to do. And I'm tellin' ya, as somebody whose job it is to stop you from ever becomin' a monster... this has been a hell of an enjoyable vacation you've given me."

"...Patricia..."

Peacock gave her a steely grin, wiping the glowing tears away. "You're a good soul, Marie. All the skullgirls are, just... pushed to the

point where they have to do somethin'. That's what the real curse is- fallin' off. But you know where you are... and you've got a chance to get back up."

Marie managed a small smile. "...thank you. Truly, I... thank you for... for giving me something I don't deserve."

"You're better than ya were, toots. Don't ever doubt it, capiche?"

8.3 (con't) XeroM52

The silence that had formed outside of the Grand Cathedral was a very heavy and uncomfortable one, but it didn't last too long.

Peacock, after hearing what Marie just said, exploded in a fit of rage. "YOU! I'M GONNA KILL YOU!" she roared, showing her metallic teeth.

But before she could inflict all sort of pain and torture to the girl standing in front of her, a soft hand rested on her shoulder stopping her on her tracks.

"Patricia, stop!" Marie ordered firmly. "Please calm down."

"But Marie! She… she killed you! Even if it was an Unawake you, I swore to kill anyone who ever dared to put a finger on you!"

"I appreciate your sentiment." Marie really did, in fact she found it really rather charming. "But right now there are more important things that need to be discussed. Isn't that right, Filia?" She turned to look at the girl still paralyzed in shock.

The poor girl was still processing what was happening right now. "How… Why...? Just now… you called me Filia Medici… is that my real name?" Filia managed to ask after calming down a little.

"You… don't remember?" Now it was Marie's turn to act surprised. "Didn't you wish for your memories to return?"

For all the Loops Marie had been Awake that weren't hijacked by Patricia and her antics, there was the constant of people coming after her for the Skullheart, with Filia being one of them. She always seemed so determined to ask for her memories back; so why was it that this version of Filia, one that had clearly defeated Marie and made a wish, wished for anything else but her memories? "What was it? What was it that you wished for?"

"I…"

"We don't have to explain ourselves to you, Skullgirl!" Samson butted-in. "Come on kid, don't let her get into your head!"

"But Samson-"

"But nothing, we came so far already, we can't surrender just yet," the Parasite said encouragingly. "We defeated the Skullgirl once, we can do so again!"

"You'll find that I'm not the same as the one you have defeated before," Marie said bluntly. "Not even the power you received from becoming a Skullgirl would help you against me."

"Yeah! And don't forget about me too," Peacock said, cracking her knuckles. "Just because Marie is stopping me from killing you, doesn't mean I can't give you a well-deserved knuckle sandwich!"

But before they could even start their climactic battle, someone had to come along and be a party pooper.

"ALL OF YOU STOP!"

That party pooper being none other than the Princess of the Canopy Kingdom herself, Parasoul Renoir.

Peacock pouted, her fun ruined. "Crap, it's her."

"Your Highness!?" For her part, Filia was much more surprised by the ruler's arrival.

"This city has already lost an important means of transport when *one* of you," Parasoul looked directly at Peacock, "derailed the train and destroyed the rails. It will cost hundreds of thousands of Bones to pay for all of that. I will not let you level down a city block and the Grand Cathedral along with it."

"I assure you, that violence was the last thing I wanted, your Highness," Marie said with an apologetic bow. "But if I were to be attacked, I would've been in my right to defend myself."

"And the train wouldn't've been destroyed if SOMEONE had allowed me to hurt the Mafia Princess over there, just a little," Peacock added to defend herself and her actions. "I mean, can't we heal a pair of broken legs and broken arms?"

"SILENCE!" Parasoul ordered again. "As I was saying, we are going to resolve this in a peaceful manner!"

Really, was it too difficult not to have a city of her Kingdom destroyed in at least ONE loop?

She turned to look at the Parasite host. "So, Filia Medici! As crowned Princess and ruler of the Canopy Kingdom, I, Princess Parasoul Renoir, request you to surrender yourself to us, and you'll have my word that no harm will come to you."

"Don't listen to them kid, this is obviously a trap!" Samson insisted.

But Filia shook her head. "No Samson I don't want to run anymore, besides… I trust the Princess," she said decisively. "Your Highness, I humbly submit myself to your care." She bowed in a display of respect.

"Good. Now, we shall continue with our talks back at HQ." Parasoul nodded and offered her hand to the runaway girl. "Please, if you

may."

"Yes, your Highness."

An hour later the Loopers reconvened back at HQ, a secret room beneath the Canopy Castle. Filia had expected the room to be some sort of secret base where highly dangerous criminals were held, but instead she found out it was a lounge with its own bar, pool tables, table football, pinball machines, 70 inch TVs, and all sorts of things Filia didn't recognize. Her confusion only grew when everyone began telling her about the Loops and the Multiverse, a tree named Yggdrasil, Admins... It was all so confusing.

"This… This is a little too much for me…" Filia confessed looking down to the table where she was sitting.

"I can't believe it either," Samson said. "But if it weren't for the Skullgirl over there, I would have said you guys are all mental." He pointed at Marie who was busy drinking a glass of sparkling wine. Seeing a person that they killed alive and well was good evidence that showed they had somehow traveled back in time.

"The last thing I remember was that I was in school and having this horrible pain in my chest," Filia said as she hovered her hand over her own heart. "Then, everything turned black. After that Samson and I woke up here."

"You became a Skullgirl," Marie mused, making everyone on the lounge to turn towards her. "That pain in the chest you described is one of the symptoms of becoming a Skullgirl. And by the sound of it, you were transcending into the second phase of the transformation."

"Second phase…?" Filia repeated back, confused.

"Depending on the kind of wish you make, the time before one becomes a Skullgirl varies," Marie explained before gulping her entire glass of wine. "Take for example the version of me you killed,"

she said bluntly, making Filia look down even more. "I made my wish during the summer; when you came for the heart it was autumn and I was in the middle of the second phase of the transformation. My mental and spiritual fortitude alone halted the transformation since I refused to give away my mind and body to the will of the Skullheart before I had the chance to fulfill my wish of eradicating the Medici Mafia."

At the mention of Medici, Filia paled at the mention of her 'supposed' last name and Marie's wish to eradicate all of those who bared or associate themselves to it.

"But unlike that version of me, when you entered the mid-stage of the transformation, you lost all of your 'self' and succumbed to the will of the Skullheart."

"My mother…" Parasoul chipped in. "She... it took a lot more time before she became a Skullgirl."

"Yes, Queen Nancy…her wish was very noble, that's why it took so long for her to become a Skullgirl. But we digress. Unlike you, Parasoul, who never had the chance to even begin your Skullgirl-fication, Filia's baseline ended for her when she lost her sense of 'self' in the second phase of the transformation. That is why now that she is Looping she has just some of the power of the Skullheart within her instead of being a full-fledged Skullgirl." Marie frowned, glancing away. "At least... that seems to be the most plausible explanation..."

"Princess…? You also made a wish upon the Heart?" Filia asked, looking at the ruler with a surprised expression.

"Yes, in an attempt to save my sister, I wished for Umbrella to never become the Skullgirl, ever. The Heart granted my wish and instead of my sister, I ended up selected to become the next Skullgirl."

"But somehow, she never went through the Skullgirl-ification process," Marie said, with a look in her eyes that showed she was as

perplexed as the rest of them. "Your baseline should've ended for you when you 'died' by losing your self. Someone or something must have ended her baseline before the transformation even began."

"I don't remember either," Parasoul said. "The last thing I remember was going to sleep after a long session of training with my sister. Then the next thing I know I was back in the past, before the attack on the Renoir Grand War Memorial by Scythana. Not to mention-"

"FOR EFF'S SAKE! Stop it with the exposition!" Peacock rudely interrupted. "We've been here for hours already! Can't you finish yet?"

"Well, you are the one who decided to stay," Parasoul shot back. "The only one that was really necessary for all of this was Marie."

"Hey! Wherever Marie goes I go too!" Peacock said with resolve, earning a look of appreciation from her best friend. "Not only that, I want to know what fatty over here wished for that caused her to become a Skullgirl so I can decide how hard I'm going to kick her ass."

"We told you, you are prohibited from harming her," the exasperated princess reminded her.

"Hey! That was before I knew she transformed into a Skullgirl! That was the third strike!"

"Third strike?"

"Yes!" Peacock said lifting her index finger. "First she is a Medici, the people whose blood I swear to spill, that's one." Then she lifted her middle finger. "She hurt Marie, Unawake or not I promised no harm would come to her, that's two." Finally, she raised her pinkie finger since she lacked a ring finger. "And now she's a Skullgirl, the thing I was created to destroy, that's the third and final strike!" she said with indignity. "Which means she is on my shit list!"

"Patricia…"

Marie tried to talk sense into her friend but Peacock was having none of it. "The only reason she isn't a smear on the floor is because Marie doesn't want me to kill her! So I decided to kick her ass, but the intensity of the beating will be determined on what she wished for to become a Skullgirl." As she said this she crossed her arms to make herself look more intimidating. "Now tell us, what did you wish for?"

"You will not put a finger on her!" Samson shouted. "You'll have to go through me first!"

"I…I..." Filia stuttered."I wished for Carol to be happy!" she revealed, much to the surprise of the rest of them. "I lost my memories, but somehow I remember Carol and I… I felt… she was suffering, and I felt I was somehow responsible for it despite not remembering at all, so I wished for her to be happy and the heart did so. She returned to school, and we became friends for the first time again."

"Maybe that is why when you enter the second phase of the Skullgirl-ification you lost your sense of self," Marie said, rubbing her chin thoughtfully. "You were satisfied with your wish and let the Heart take over."

"But why did she transform so quickly?" Parasoul asked, "Her wish was noble, she should've lasted longer."

"She wished for the happiness of another, but it was still selfish," Marie pointed out. "The Heart must've felt that Filia was trying to make herself feel better and ease her forgotten guilt by making her wish." She took a deep breath. "No matter how selfless you think your wish is, the Heart will always find a way to corrupt it or the wisher. You could have the purest soul, but the simple act of wishing on itself is selfish, making a person impure of heart."

"Yeah, yeah, that's good and all…" Peacock said, not really interested on hearing what she already knew. "I'm still going to kick

this girl's ass!" She cracked her knuckles.

"PATRICIA!" Marie raised her voice to a yell.

This made everyone take a step backwards in fear since the maid never, ever, raised her voice for anything.

"You better stop this instant!"

"M... M… Ma… rie…" Peacock stuttered in fear, an emotion she hadn't felt in a LONG time.

"If you don't start behaving and acting nice to Filia, I'll… I'll no longer do the thing you like!"

"The thing!? You don't mean *that* thing, do you?"

"Yes, *that* thing!" Marie said, crossing her arms.

"No! Not that thing!" Patricia pleaded. "I'll behave! I'll behave!"

"Good."

"I… I don't understand what is going on." Filia looked up towards the Princess for some clarification.

"Neither do I," Parasoul said honestly. "And frankly I don't want to know." Like they said, sometimes ignorance was bliss. "Anyway, I think we are finished here. We better get out of here," she continued while ignoring whatever Peacock and Marie were discussing.

"But princess, I still have so much to ask! What should I do? Where should I go from here?"

"Live, Filia. You just have to live and find that answer for yourself!" Parasoul said sagely, sounding wise beyond the age she looked. "Now, I think there is someone who is dying to see you."

As soon as she said that, the door to the lounge was kicked opened and a figure darted into the room. "FILIA!" a resounding voice called out for her before a small body tackled said girl into a big hug. "I'm glad you're okay!"

8.14 XeroM52

[Skullgirls][One Punch Man]

"Another Loop, another Awakening." Marie sighed as she found herself down the catacombs of the Grand Cathedral of the Trinity. "I wonder why should I do this Loop…?"

Usually Marie would go out and spent the Loop with Patricia if the two of them happened to be awake. But in the rare case of her being alone, she would usually remain down here and let things play out by themselves. *'I just have to wait for Patricia's Ping and then-'*

She didn't even finish her thought before she sensed a grave disturbance in the force. It took her a few minutes to concentrate on it, but the moment she realized what it meant her eyes went wide.

"PATRICIA!"

Her dearest friend was in pain, and she was crying out for help!

The usually calm maid, in a burst of incredible power, tore through the ceiling of the catacombs and through the Grand Cathedral, making it crumble. She didn't care about anything but getting to Patricia as soon as possible, and if she had to level the entire country to do so then so be it.

Thankfully the destruction was kept to a minimum after Marie managed to arrive deep inside the occult chambers of the secret underground Anti-Skullgirl Labs. "PATRICIA!" Marie screamed as

she found the body of her friend laying on the floor completely motionless. "NOOO!" She made a mad dash towards the downed body of her friend and started to check for any sort of injuries or fatal wounds. None of which she found.

"M… Ma… rie…?" Peacock barely managed to utter out.

"Patricia! What's wrong? What happened?" Whatever caused her to end up like this?

"I… I'm… s…scared…"

"Scared?" Patricia was never scared! Whatever happened, it must have been monstrous. "Don't you worry! I'm here and I'll get you to someone that can help you…"

"Ma… rie… I…"Peacock voice trembled at each syllable she uttered until she completely lost all consciousness.

"Patricia…" Marie tried to wake her up to no avail. "No! PATRICIAAA!"

Hours later every available Looper was in a top secret medical chamber on the underground of the Renoir Castle, where some of the best medical equipment in the whole country could be found. Parasoul, Big Band, and Carol were all looking grimly at the scene before them through a glass window.

On the other side of the glass, Peacock was sleeping on a hospital bed, for the third day straight. Marie had kept her company for those 72 hours, never moving away from her side; not taking a single break, not even to sleep.

"What did the doctors say?" Big Band asked Parasoul.

She just sighed and shook her head. "Physically… there is nothing wrong with her. Beyond the obvious prosthetics, I mean. Whatever

happened to her, it must have been psychological."

"Psychological…" Carol muttered sadly. She knew firsthand how awful mental and psychological damage could be.

"But what caused it?" Ben asked worriedly.

"If I had to guess… it must have been caused by something she experienced in the Loop before she Awoke in this one."

That was the only logical explanation for all of this. But now the question was, where did Peacock go and what happened in that Loop? They could not get the answers until Peacock recovered consciousness.

"Right now all we can do is just wait; wait until Peacock awakes so she can tell us what happened and then we can know how to help her."

"But how long would this coma last?" Carol asked, concerned. "Marie hasn't left that room since Peacock arrived and I'm not sure if she would even if the three of us try using force. "

"Those two…" the princess said sadly as she looked at Marie through the glass, who was holding Peacock's hand. "They are very close…" She had heard just bits and pieces here and there about the two girls' past and what they have gone through, but what she was seeing was beyond the bonds of friendship. Parasoul could see as clear as day that Marie loved Peacock with her entire being and soul.

"I wouldn't worry too much about Marie," Big Band said. "As a Skullgirl, things like sleeping or eating are inconsequential for her. The energy of the Skullheart is all that she needs."

"I can comprehend how she feels though," Carol commented. "If it were you in that bed, Ben, I wouldn't leave your side either."

"I appreciate it. But if something like that happens to me, I don't want you to spend it locked in a stuffy room with me all the time. I would want you to take better care for yourself. You should leave the worrying for old people like me."

"I guess I can understand Marie's feelings too…" Parasoul sighed. "If it were Umbrella, even with the Loops resetting everything to normal, I too would spend all of my time next to my little sister."

The three of them fell into a gloomy and introspective silence. Tragedies like this one would present themselves one day to anyone, but as long as they had each other to help and lend a hand, things would never be bleak.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the maid inside the room on the other side of the glass.

"Patricia?" Marie exclaimed as the bedridden girl struggled to open her eyes.

"M... Ma… rie…?" Peacock whispered sounding extremely tired. "Is that… you?"

"Yes… It is me!" Marie said as tears began to flow from her eyes.

"Why… you crying…?" the newly conscious Peacock asked seeing Marie in tears.

"Because… because I'm happy to see you…" Marie responded while wiping off her tears.

"Then… that's not.. a gun in your pants…" Peacock managed a very tired laugh.

"You… idiot…" Marie said, not really minding Peacock's joke and giving her dearest friend a big hug.

Hours later, Peacock was acting like her normal self as if nothing had ever happened.

"So anyone remembered to tape the last episode of Annie while I was in a coma?"

"I did… as I waited I sent some of my undead minions to our usual hangout and taped all the tv shows you missed," Marie informed with a small nod.

"Aww! And that's why I love ya toots!"

Marie looked away, red appearing on her face.

"You guys could learn a thing or three from Marie here," she pointed at the rest of them.

"We are glad you are feeling better too," Parasoul said, ignoring her antics. It seemed that Peacock was back to her former self.

"You gave us a pretty big scare, Patricia," Ben said. "I don't want to force the issue, but…could you tell us what happened to you…?"

"I… do remember you saying you were 'scared...'" Marie recalled worriedly. She too wanted to know what happened so she could do everything in her power so that it would never happen again.

"I…" Peacock entire demeanor did a complete 180° as she tensed completely. "Last Loop I saw something that I never believe possible… I met… I met this man…"

"A man…?" Carol repeated perplexed. "Did… did he do something to you…?"

"I… He…" Peacock's voice trembled as she found it very difficult to talk at the moment.

"I'll kill him," Marie said coldly, making the temperature of the entire room drop several degrees. "Whoever he is I'll kill him." The cold

anger in her voice was enough for everyone to take a step away from her out of pure instinctive fear.

"No… he didn't do anything to me… at least not intentionally…" Peacock explained, not wanting anybody to think the worst. "He just kinda… crushed my ego…"

"Your ego…?" Big Band was the first to ask. "What do you mean by that?"

"I… You've always known me as this badass fighter that nothing can touch, right?" she said, not even noticing the eye-rolling of everyone but Marie. "Even I was starting to believe I was invincible. That nothing or no one could ever defeat me… until I met him."

"Who? Was it one of the Original 7?" Carol wondered. If there was someone that could take Peacock down a peg or two, it would have to be someone among the O7.

"No," Peacock said grimly. "It wasn't one of them… it was someone far beyond their level."

"Far beyond the most ancient Loopers?" Parasoul frankly couldn't believe there was such a person. "You must be kidding."

"No, I am not kidding." Patricia shook her head. "This man surpasses anything that I thought was possible… he was... a god… NO! He was more than a god, since the word GOD falls short to describe someone like him."

"Who? Who are you talking about?"

"I dare not to speak his name…" Peacock answered, conflicted. "But I can show him to you…" She pulled out an instant film and began to concentrate on the image of this 'god'. "Here, he is… in all of his god-like glory."

"Are… are you for real?" Parasoul asked, completely underwhelmed by the appearance of said god. "He doesn't look all that tough."

"Looks can be deceiving… I learned that lesson the hard way…" Patricia trailed off with a grim look on her face. That punch of his was all that she needed to see him as what he truly was. She would never forget that power she felt before the Loop ended for her. "But, now my eyes have been opened… so to speak… I met with the only OTG, and now I shall spread his word across Loops and live my life under his guidance…"

"Wait, are you…"

"Yes! You are seeing the New Head for the Skullgirls Branch of the Church of One-Punch, or SGBCOP, for short," Peacock announced with a smile.

"Peacock…?" Parasoul pinched her nose, feeling a headache coming in. "Are you really founding your own religion?"

"The one true religion!" Peacock clarified. "Where we all try to aspire to do as our Lord… and beat everyone with ONE SINGLE PUNCH!"

"…"

"…"

"…"

"So… how do I join?" Marie was the only one to ask.

"Just like that! You are already in! Heck, you're now the vice president of the SGBCOP! Congratulations!"

"Yay…"

While the two of them began discussing their future plans for their new church, Big Band whispered into the princess' ear. "Shouldn't we… stop them?"

"No…" Parasoul answered, still pinching the edge of her nose. "I'm sure they'll forget about it in a couple of Loops…"

8.15 Masterweaver

Black Dahlia was many things. Flesh. Bone. Steel. Silk. Gunpowder. Iron. And just a hint of brass.

Nowhere in there was a single scrap of timidity.

She glowered disdainfully at the handsome mass of muscle that had just burst through Lorenzo's door. A thug who thought a wolf pelt would make him look any less like a country bumpkin... and having a folding chair, of all things, strapped to his back. Of course she knew who he was-a washed-up wrestler with more bark than bite, who had needed the assistance of the Medici's shadowy hand to impress the crowd and fallen into mockery after his acting career proved suboptimal.

"LORENZO MEDICI!" the idiot howled. "Your actions have tainted the legacy of my battles! Your manipulations have destroyed the Name of BEOWULF! I will see to it that they are EXPOSED for the DISGUSTING DISGRACE that they are!"

The old man huffed. "My security these days is abysmal, it seems. Dahlia, if you would?"

In less than a second, Dahlia had her shotgun pointed and blasted.

In the same space of time, the wrestler had whipped out his chair and spun it, deflecting the scattershot.

Not a *total* idiot, then.

The two charged each other, swinging their weapons as one. Dahlia batted the chair aside with the barrel of her gun, sliding forward and

kicking her pointed foot into Beowulf's scraggly chin. Her other foot locked into the ground as her ankle spun a full 720 degrees, sweeping her underneath the man's knees for a grab at his ankle and letting her smash him into the ground as she rose up. A metal foot pressed into the powerful pectorals as the large muzzle of her weapon snapped to the rugged muzzle of his wolf mask.

"What was it you wrestlers did? Count to ten, and that's a loss?"

"Something like that."

Beowulf sprang up from his prone position, unbalancing Dahlia long enough for one of his huge fists to smash into her face. She hit the ground dazed, but recovered quickly enough to feel his hand wrap around her ankle and begin to swing her into the air. A twist of her waist and a flick of her gun's stock let loose a plume of fire at the height of the swing's arc, Beowulf roaring more in shock than pain as the fire forced his grip open. Inertia had Dahlia flying through the air, but with a twirl she recovered, skidding to a stop in front of Lorenzo's desk. The glass eye behind her veil gleamed as she glared up, noting how Beowulf had already shaken the flame off his arm and sunk into a ready stance.

He charged forward, but this time Dahlia held her ground, spinning her cape in front of her just long enough to hide the knife emerging from her knee. A vicious jab presented the point to the wrestler's groin, followed up by her swinging the serrated blade that sprung from the underside of her shotgun's barrel. Beowulf managed to avoid an unplanned shave with an uppercut to the blade and slammed his other fist into the woman's chest, sending her somersaulting over Lorenzo's desk. It was only then that he noticed the mafia man had vanished.

"WHAT?! How dare Lorenzo Medici RUN from his crimes! I thought even criminals had a twisted sense of HONOR!"

Dahlia huffed as she stood. "This is the real world, wolf-boy. There's no honor." She tossed a perfume bottle onto the desk. "Only

technique."

Beowulf looked at the perfume bottle in confusion for a moment, which was long enough for her to jab it with one of her concealed pokers. It exploded, flaming glass scratching his skin and burning scents blinding his vision long enough for Dahlia to rush behind him, put her gun to his head, and pull the trigger.

Well, *almost* pull the trigger. In the last half-second, she was grappled by a ghostly gigan arm that lifted her up, so her shot went into Beowulf's shoulder instead of his skull. He still cried out in pain, the ghostly arm vanishing, but he braced himself against the desk and swung his legs up, wrapping them around Dahlia's waist as she fell and sending them both smashing out the highest window of Medici tower.

The two tumbled through the air, Beowulf releasing Dahlia to punch her repeatedly as she launched shot after shot into his face. Wind whistled through their ears as the ground drew closer, drowning out everything around them, and yet the old lady could almost swear she heard the joyful howling coming from the muscular man's mouth. Halfway down she decided to cut her losses, blasting toward the tower and jamming all the blades hidden in her gun into it; her gaze trailed the wrestler as she scraped to a stop three floors from the ground, ready to watch him splat into the pavement.

At the last second, Beowulf pulled out his chair and unfolded it beneath him, smashing heavily into the ground-much to the startled reactions of the citizens around him. His eyes met hers, and he smirked wildly, standing up and dusting himself off. The chair was folded up again, heaved back and launched, embedding itself into the wall of the tower.

Before she could even process all that, the man had rushed forward, jumped onto the chair, and springboarded up to pound her skull against the concrete with a single massive fist.

Dahlia fell onto the canopy over the tower's entrance, rolling off into the road below. Her head rang as she struggled to push herself up, vision swimming even as the barrel of her gun pressed into the asphalt. She looked up just in time to see Beowulf had recovered that damned folding chair.

Then he swung it, and she knew no more.

"Actually not that bad for a first try," Peacock complimented. "Granny's a real menace, usually we just overpower her ta get to Lorenzo. And honestly, you completely wrecked her, big guy! Great going!"

Beowulf barked a laugh as he crossed his arms. "She was a real heel, I'll grant her that. But she just couldn't stand up to the hype!"

"Did anybody even watch your fight?" Marie asked.

"The Wulfpack's power transcends the ring!"

"...ah-huh."

"Come on, Marie!" Peacock said. "He was awesome!"

"I'm not denying that, just kind of... well..." Marie shrugged. "I don't know, surprised? I didn't think that he had many looping tricks yet."

"That was all BEOWULF!" the wrestler declared.

"Yeah it was!" Peacock agreed.

Marie rolled her eyes. "Well, I suppose what works works..."

8.3 (con't) XeroM52

"Carol?" Filia said, surprised. "What…What are you doing here?"

"I'm here to see you of course! We are friends!" Carol responded as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"Are we?" Filia asked, sounding a little down. "I don't have any memories of my life before Samson. And the Carol I was friends with was another you altogether. How can you say we're really friends?"

"But I do," Carol responded without hesitation. "I remember the good times we had, and every time I loop, I made some time to try and befriend you. You are my friend; I just hope I can be yours…"

"Carol…" Filia, moved by the other girl's words returned the hug and started tearing up.

"I see they reconciled without a hitch," Big Band commented as he entered the room. "Sorry for taking so long, Princess. I had to help with the train incident, not to mention pick up Carol and bring her here."

"No need to apologize," Parasoul said. "In fact, I shall be thanking you for all your hard work." Of all the Loopers, Parasoul was grateful of Big Band the most, not only he was one of the sanest around; he also avoided and actively prevented disasters from befalling her Kingdom. For all that, she was grateful.

"Princess, I require a word."

Parasoul turned to Marie. "Yes?"

"During Patricia's encounter, Filia demonstrated some of the Skullgirl's power." Marie frowned, absently rubbing her exposed ribs. "That... strikes me as unusual."

"Well, she was a skullgirl-"

"No, not that. You were also a skullgirl, if not a fully transformed one. But when you started looping, you... didn't have the power. The

transformation didn't continue." Marie glanced at Filia warily. "I believe Filia is being honest with us, but..."

"But you're worried about her keeping the power through the loops," Big Band concluded.

"The implications that has... I am bonded to the Skullheart, being the Skullgirl is my burden. She should not have been able to use that power at all."

Parasoul and Big Band shared a look.

"...Times like this, I wish we had the phone number for the Admins," Parasoul grumbled. "I don't know what to say, Marie. Just... we'll keep an eye on her."

Big Band nodded. "Don't matter the universe. We're all going to look out for each other."

"That is all I ask."

The man hummed thoughtfully. "Today's been hectic. I really need to take a break.

"You've worked the hardest of us all," Parasoul pointed out with a smile. "In fact why don't I offer you a drink?"

"That would be nice."

"I would also like a drink!" the black Parasite Samson said as he stretched himself away from the sappy scene both Filia and Carol were sharing. "I'm not drunk enough to deal with this crap."

"Hey! Don't forget about us!" Peacock joined in alongside Marie, who finally ended with whatever discussion they had. "We also want some booze!"

"Fine."

And with that, the Loopers drank away and celebrated the fact that someone else had joined their hectic group.

Compiler's commentary:

8.1: These are the risks of ruling over a nation with bored time travelers.

8.2: A bad first impression can have long-lasting consequences, not all of them good.

8.3: You know, it's hard to welcome people to the loops when they don't stop running. But it can be worth it.

8.4: The road to hell is paved with good intentions, but only on the first few stones.

8.5: Care for even the least of theirs is the mark of a great ruler.

8.6: The whole "thou shall not kill" concept eludes Peacock, to Parasoul's frustration.

8.7: Sometimes, the biggest steps are the smallest things.

8.8: To be fair to Parasoul, Peacock has been known to carry questionable material in bags.

8.9: Nature is so fascinating...

8.10: It's a reasonable and totally honest mistake.

8.11: Make the punishment fit the criminal, after all.

8.12: After all the stress of running a nation, a little bounty-hunting mission seems like the perfect vacation for this princess.

8.13: How often do we wish for second chances? And how often do we fulfil them?

8.14: Understanding Peacock's mind is an exercise in futility.

8.15: It's not usually acceptable to beat up the elderly, but...

And if you, dear reader, should wish to contribute your own snip, you are welcome to join us on the Indie Games Infinite Loops thread over on Spacebattles.